

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

# Sight & Sound

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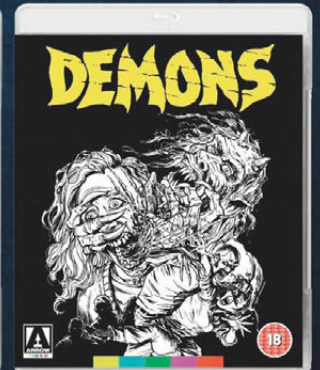
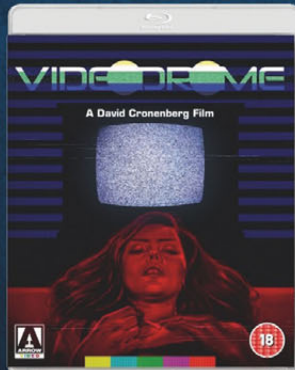
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After a series of masterworks of American *cinéma vérité*, D.A. Pennebaker found fresh creative impetus with Chris Hegedus. The pair have created a formidable body of work, charting 40 years of change. By **Eric Hynes**



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Screen print by Kate Gibb  
www.kategibb.co.uk

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# new films



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**film of the month**



**high rise**  
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**a bigger splash**  
also available on blu-ray  
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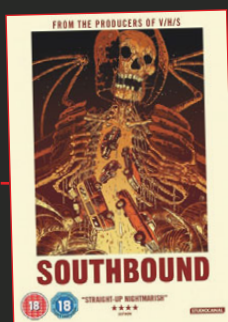
**disorder**  
also available on blu-ray  
released 25/07/16



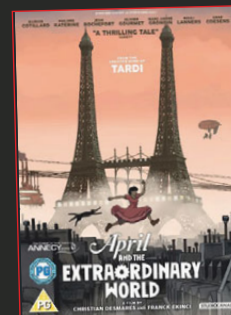
**the witch**  
also available on blu-ray  
released 18/07/16



**southbound**  
also available on blu-ray  
released 08/08/16



**bang gang**  
released 18/07/16

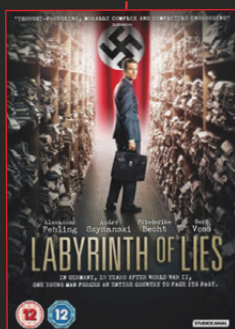


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**labyrinth of lies**  
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**the ones below**  
out now



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# Editorial Nick James



## THE BRIGHT SIDE

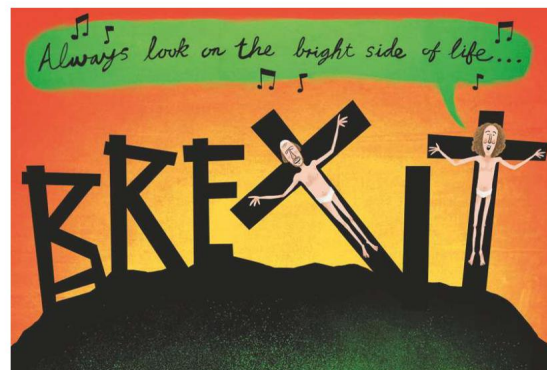
A friend, kind enough to read this column every month, recently suggested (pre-Brexit) that I've been getting too negative. Given current circumstances, with the world aghast at what the UK has done, no one would blame me if I paused here for bitter laughter... For how could anyone, in this moment of great political, cultural and commercial uncertainty, lose the downbeat tone?

The only way to find out is to try, within the narrow confines of audiovisual matters, to see if there's a bright side to Brexit's impact. Geoffrey Macnab's study of the state of film distribution and exhibition from a UK perspective (see page 38) was written and prepared before the referendum decision was in; but it describes, in any case, a sector that's knowingly in flux and trying new strategies. Which is good, because they will need to be equally inventive when we lose the EU rules and funding.

I want to come back to that point, but first I'd like to go over what we've heard so far about Brexit's possible impact on UK film and television. *Variety* was first out of the gate, listing seven likely consequences. In summary, they were: 1) the possible end of financial backing from Creative Europe (successor to the MEDIA Programme as the EU's funding body for film, TV and digital media; 2) British television will no longer qualify as EU product – channels with quotas for European content may buy less British TV; 3) working abroad may become more difficult with visas, etc, required; 4) the UK's absence from decision-making within the EU leaves us without influence there; 5) a weak pound messes with budgets; 6) the UK will be free from 'State Aid' rules, so that, in theory, the government could offer more funding; 7) uncertainty will rule for a time.

In an article at ScreenDaily.com, the law firm Olswang agreed that the free movement of people is likely to be hampered or restricted, and suggested that certain goods such as DVDs could be subject to tariffs. They worried that we will have no say in any change to the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, which allows producers freedom of reception throughout Europe, and were concerned that British consumers would lose the new possible right to access online video services while abroad. More positively, Olswang argued that the UK would be free of EU oversight on artistic subsidies and could now reframe the 'Cultural Test' (which decides what counts as a British film) to suit itself. What's of most concern to all, however, is the €100 million in audiovisual aid the UK received from the EU between 2007 and 2013 – money that, as well as going into productions and co-productions, helps to distribute foreign-language films in the UK.

The BFI, our parent organisation, echoes the line being put out by the government's Department for Culture, Media and Sport – nothing will change for at least two years, so it's business as usual until we know



*The flux we are in now – with over-supply of films, the breakdown of format windows and the multiple use of theatres – has parallels with the situation that prevailed in the 1920s*

more. Most of the above comment from the trade papers is informed speculation: nobody can yet say for sure what will or will not be on the table once talks start. So another slightly positive thing to say is that nothing destructive has actually been triggered yet.

It's also the case that a weak pound lowers costs for Hollywood productions in the UK, so at least our actors and technicians should continue to do well. That's another positive. But that's all I can see right now. I invite those who can think of further advantages to forward them to our letters page.

Coming back to the current flux in the ways and means by which we watch audiovisual culture: one of the obvious parallels one can draw – given the problems of over-supply of films, of the breakdown of format windows and of the multiple use of theatres – is with the situation that prevailed in the 1920s. Then, the model of the feature film in a theatre was just one of many manifestations of film and film projection and had not yet come to dominate how the medium was thought about; this was the heyday of the French avant-garde, a time when modernism was driving the major art movements of the 20th century and innovation was to the fore. Visual art and film were drawn to experiment.

And since Brexit's revenge is to send us back to 1970s levels of austerity, we might also consider that that was the decade when the punk movement – which we celebrate this month (see page 20) – was born. Wouldn't it be making the best of a bad situation if the passion and rage of the Remainers could be channelled into great new audiovisual works, which confront the vile racism that Brexit has encouraged, and shake up our age? I hope so.



IN THE FRAME

## MATERIAL GIRL



The African queen: Vivien Leigh in the head-dress Oliver Messel made for *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1945)

Vivien Leigh's turbulent private life often overshadowed her career. An exhibition of her costumes and letters redresses the balance

**By Nathalie Morris**

The romantic setting of Nymans, a semi-ruined faux-medieval manor house in Sussex, provides a fitting venue for the second leg of the Victoria and Albert Museum's touring exhibition, *Vivien Leigh: Public Faces, Private Lives*. Showcasing highlights from the Vivien Leigh archive, which the V&A bought from Leigh's grandchildren in 2013, the displays try to give fresh insights into the actress, concentrating on her work and career rather than on her turbulent personal life. Leigh was a meticulous record keeper and her extensive archive includes more than 7,500 letters, telegrams and postcards, as well as diaries, scrapbooks, photographs, and theatre and film scripts. A selection of these are on show alongside other V&A objects, including a Dior-designed costume from the play *Duel of Angels* (1958), and, most significantly, pieces from the archive of Leigh's friend and trusted collaborator, the designer Oliver Messel.

Messel was the leading theatrical designer of his day and also worked on a handful of films, in Britain and Hollywood. He first met Leigh when he designed for the 1937 London Old Vic production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—Leigh played Titania, queen of the fairies—and was her choice to design the costumes for the film *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1945). "I told Pascal that nobody in the world must do the costumes except you," Leigh wrote in a letter, displayed at the exhibition, begging him to design for Gabriel Pascal's screen adaptation of George Bernard Shaw's play. Messel was doing war duty as a camouflage officer at the time and when he came to make the film materials were in short supply. In response he applied a 'make do and mend' philosophy, creating more than 2,000 costumes by utilising costume houses, repurposing Liberty saris and employing everyday materials such as leather, glass and papier mâché.

Nymans was Messel's childhood home and, like the house, the designer's work is both highly romantic and consummate

ON OUR  
RADAR

### Barry Lyndon

Don't miss the chance to see Stanley Kubrick's most spectacular film (right) on the big screen. His adaptation of William Thackeray's tale of the rise and fall of an 18th-century Irish rogue has been restored and is rereleased by the BFI in cinemas across the UK on 29 July.



### Jazz on Film

Running alongside the Manchester Jazz Festival is HOME's season of jazz-themed documentaries, biopics and films renowned for their scores (17-31 July). Highlights include Louis Malle's 'Lift to the Scaffold', Shirley Clarke's 'The Connection' (right), Clint Eastwood's Charlie Parker biopic 'Bird', and 'Tubby Hayes: A Man in a Hurry', a little-seen doc about the great British jazzman.







Scarlett woman: Leigh as cover girl following the release of *Gone with the Wind*



creative artifice. This is exemplified by two key objects in the exhibition: the fairy crown Messel conceived for Titania – a magical confection of wire, organza, cellophane and rhinestones – and the show-stopping head-dress Leigh wore in *Caesar and Cleopatra*.

Costume and make-up were always important elements of Leigh's performances, on stage and screen. The exhibition shows how her Oscar-winning turn as the mentally fragile Blanche DuBois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951) was supported by Lucinda Ballard's diaphanous chiffon outfits and blonde wigs by Stanley Hall of Wig Creations (when playing a role, Leigh always preferred wigs to styling her own hair). In a letter shown here Tennessee Williams tells Leigh she was "the Blanche I had always dreamed of".

Alongside her professionalism and talent, the exhibition highlights Leigh's huge popularity. Although she always considered herself more an actress than a star (and indeed, more a theatre actress than a film one), *Gone with the Wind* netted her not only an Oscar but the Christmas 1939 cover of *Time* magazine. For Winston Churchill's favourite film *That Hamilton Woman* (1941), Leigh received top billing above her husband Laurence Olivier, exacerbating his envy of her screen stardom. They never starred opposite each other again. She was versatile, holding her own against Hollywood legends such as Clark Gable, Method actors such as Marlon Brando and new Hollywood talent of the 60s such as Warren Beatty.

While the exhibition seeks to emphasise Leigh's professional rather than personal life, it is clear that the two were closely intertwined. The visitors' book for Leigh and Olivier's home, Notley Abbey, where they lived and entertained from 1944-60, is a Who's Who of the film, theatre and literary worlds. One guest was Bette Davis, who stayed with her husband Gary Merrill in 1952 when they were filming the country house murder story *Another Man's Poison*. In a thank-you letter to her hostess (and pre-dating the emergence of the emoji by a good four decades) Davis writes, "I was so stimulated, I had to take a sleeping pill ☺."

A final, charming coda to the exhibition, hidden in an outbuilding known as the Cook's Kitchen, is 'Vivien Leigh in 3D', a slideshow of 30-odd images (3D glasses required) created from her extensive collection of stereoscopic photographs taken in the 1950s and 60s. These beautiful colour photos show Leigh at her most relaxed and unguarded, swimming in director George Cukor's pool, getting ready in her dressing room, and eating *gelato* with friends in Italy in the 1950s. Sitting alone watching these on a grey and rainy summer's afternoon, I couldn't help but feel they provided an appropriate and poignant finale to this richly nuanced reappraisal of Vivien Leigh's life and work. 

**i** 'Vivien Leigh: Public Faces, Private Lives' is at Nymans, near Haywards Heath, West Sussex, until 4 September

## LISTOMANIA BRITISH APOCALYPSE

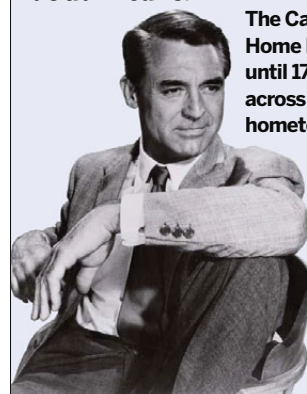
The aftermath of the Brexit referendum seems a suitable time to ponder a thriving British genre: the man-made apocalypse drama.

- 1 **The Day the Earth Caught Fire** (1961)  
Val Guest
- 2 **It Happened Here** (1964)  
Kevin Brownlow
- 3 **The War Game** (1965)  
Peter Watkins
- 4 **The Bed Sitting Room** (1969)  
Richard Lester
- 5 **Threads** (1984)  
Mick Jackson
- 6 **When the Wind Blows** (1986, below)  
Jimmy T. Murakami
- 7 **28 Days Later** (2002)  
Danny Boyle
- 8 **Children of Men** (2006)  
Alfonso Cuarón
- 9 **High-Rise** (2015)  
Ben Wheatley
- 10 **The Survivalist** (2015)  
Stephen Fingleton



## QUOTE OF THE MONTH CARY GRANT

'We have our factory, which is called a stage. We make a product, we colour it, we title it, and we ship it out in cans.'



**The Cary Comes Home Festival runs until 17 July at venues across Grant's hometown of Bristol**

### Cinema Rediscovered

The UK finally has a festival dedicated to restorations of old films in the mould of Bologna's Il Cinema Ritrovato. The first edition runs from 28-31 July at Bristol's Watershed cinema. A tribute to British DP Douglas Slocombe, including 'The Lion in Winter' (right), features alongside restored gems such as Kathleen Collins's 'Losing Ground', and Pietra Brettkelly's recent doc 'A Flickering Truth', about an Afghan film archive rescued from the Taliban.



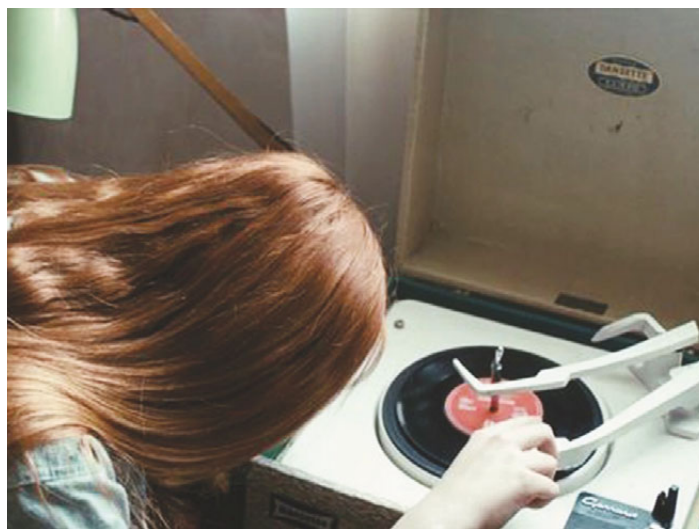
### Pedro Almodóvar

Coinciding with the release of Almodóvar's 20th feature, 'Julieta', is a season celebrating the Spanish auteur (right) at BFI Southbank, London, which runs from August to October. As well as offering the chance to catch Almodóvar's back catalogue on the big screen, the programme will include 13 Spanish films chosen by him, including Luis García Berlanga's 'The Executioner', Víctor Erice's 'El sur' and Carlos Vermut's 'Magical Girl'.





# JUST FOR THE RECORD



Down in the groove: (Clockwise from top left) *A Clockwork Orange* (1971), *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), *Ginger & Rosa* (2012) and *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994)

Despite the changing times, cinema has kept faith with turntables as shorthand for all that is holy or hip about playing recorded music



**By Hannah McGill**

Whether it's down to the family relationship – zoetropes deployed the mechanics of gramophones, and gramophones provided early cinema music and sound – or the frequent technostalgia of filmmakers and film buffs, there's a sentimental affinity between movies and record players. Compact discs have gained little traction as onscreen objects of desire, unless one counts the dubious endorsement of Patrick Bateman in *American Psycho* (2000); tapes might command affection but not much respect; digital playlists lack tangibility and tactility. But just as dedicated music snobs never junked their vinyl even during the format's millennial spell of almost obsolescence, so cinema has kept faith with turntables as shorthand for all that is holy, hip or heartfelt

in the experience of playing recorded music. "I can't afford to start over," says the eponymous Jackie Brown in Quentin Tarantino's 1997 film as she drops the needle on The Delfonics.

The beauty, unwieldiness and delicacy of the record player has proved a useful symbol for the human urge to enhance, compete with or drown out nature by way of art – whatever the rigours and complications of doing so. In Ingmar Bergman's *Summer with Monika* (1953), a record player on a river bank not only supplies musical accompaniment to a spot of heavy petting, but epitomises the couple's determination to structure a world that perfectly enables their sensual and sensory pleasure. In the recent *Embrace of the Serpent*, the intention of transporting a gramophone deep into the Amazonian jungle is less carnal but no less deeply felt: it supplies the American explorer Evan (Brionne Davis) with a connection to the life, country and

*The record player has proved a useful symbol for the human urge to enhance, compete with or drown out nature by way of art*

ancestors he has left behind, and the film with an aspect of its meditation on the meaning of civilisation. The music he plays to his Amazonian guide Karamakate is Haydn's *The Creation*, and creation by nature, God and man are all evoked. If the film charges Western civilisation with ruinous expansion, destructive greed and the unthinking imposition of values, it also acknowledges that the same urges to build and influence produce great art. To Karamakate, meanwhile, the music is akin to a dream: no more willed, and no less meaningful. "You must follow it," he tells Evan.

This gramophone also pays implicit tribute to an ancestor of its own: the one used in *Fitzcarraldo* (1982), a film which *Embrace of the Serpent* pays homage to and offers challenges to throughout. The titular explorer/exploiter/dreamer/madman of Werner Herzog's film attempts, via his dreams of building an opera house, to impose a narrative of culture and beauty on the colonial project. The impracticality of the project and the fervour that drives it are both prefigured in the scene in which he plays Caruso to a party of potential investors on his gramophone, and clings jealously to it when an associate tries to take it away. Later he will use the machine to blast more Caruso into the jungle, in an effort



to connect with the indigenous people – and enlist their labour in following his dreams.

The use of classical music or opera played on record as shorthand for all that is most perfect in human achievement – creativity at its most impassioned and ambitious, but also its most refined – recurs in *Equilibrium* (2002), when Beethoven supplies a route to emotions suppressed by a totalitarian regime; and in *The Shawshank Redemption* (1994), in which the music of Mozart permits a yard full of prisoners to “feel free” when Tim Robbins’s Andy plays it through the prison’s loudspeakers. In *Starman* (1977), recorded sound has a still more profound function: the alien’s source of information about and contact with the human race is the phonograph record left on board the Voyager 2 space probe.

Records symbolise edifying culture rejected by teenage rebels when they’re smashed to bits in *Blackboard Jungle* (1955); but the record player also symbolises the other side of the generation gap, a symbol of heady teenage rejection of adult conformity. For a period, it might have seemed as if *A Clockwork Orange* (1971) erred in imagining that the cool young hoodlums of the near future would play their “fuzzy warbles” on vinyl, rather than some higher-tech format. But then came the re-emergence of vinyl records as symbols of personal and musical authenticity. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* (2013), set in 1991, asserts the self-conscious connoisseurship of its teenage characters by having Sam (Emma Watson) tell her companions, “Things sound so much better on vinyl” – and the film’s marketeers backed her up by releasing its soundtrack in LP form. *Almost Famous* (2000), *Ginger & Rosa* (2012) and *Whip It* (2013) also link the intensity of adolescent self-discovery with the specific intimacy and satisfaction of connecting needle to groove. In *Crazy, Stupid, Love* (2011), it’s specifically sexual: the fact that Jacob (Ryan Gosling) puts on a vinyl record during his date with Hannah (Emma Stone) is one of many indications that this practised seducer knows exactly how to apply delicate treatment to sensitive objects. In *The Virgin Suicides* (1993), records stand in for sex when the shy boys use their phone contact with the incarcerated Lisbon girls solely to play songs to them.

That’s exactly the sort of calculated, attention-seeking move that would earn the scathing contempt of Enid and Rebecca in *Ghost World* (2001), a film in which authenticity means constantly staying a step ahead of the “extroverted, obnoxious, pseudo-bohemian losers” who attempt to co-opt aspects of your genuine weirdness into their mainstream world. Enid’s yearning for the truly unorthodox leads her to Seymour (Steve Buscemi), who collects early 20th century blues music on 78 rpm (1935 is the cut-off point for his interest). Enid herself also sources what seems like a genuine emotional response, distinct from the fakery she diagnoses in almost everyone around her, via the rediscovery of a record from her own childhood. A technology once used to epitomise teenage cool has become a source of refuge from its tyrannies; a system for seduction a solace for one who wants no part of sex at all. **S**

## THE FIVE KEY...

# ALI SCREEN APPEARANCES

Muhammad Ali’s magnetic presence lives on in his screen outings, showing him floating like a butterfly and stinging like a bee

By Christina Newland

Few athletes are equipped to play themselves on screen better than movie stars, irrespective of the scale of their achievements. But Muhammad Ali, the great heavyweight champion of the world, was one of those rare few – beautifully formed, with the footwork of a dancer and the linguistic agility of a poet. He was a dream of a prizefighter, and the hope of countless black Americans. No one could outshine him – to paraphrase his famous opponent George Foreman, movie stars, CEOs, and presidents all turned to face him when he entered a room. In memory of one of the bravest Americans of the 20th century, here are five of Muhammad Ali’s best screen appearances – big and small.



## 1 Assorted TV interviews

If there was one thing Ali was as good at as boxing, it was talking. That made him a chat show regular, be it with Johnny Carson, Michael Parkinson (above) or Terry Wogan. He argued racial politics with Parkinson, punched a speed bag with Clint Eastwood and recited his famous rhymes on Ed Sullivan. It’s hard to choose a favourite moment, but thanks to YouTube, you probably don’t have to.



## 2 The Greatest (1977)

This Ali biopic, starring the man himself, is a smoothed-over ode to the fighter, cheerfully ignoring the realities of his turbulent romantic life and the finer points of his radical political views. Still, it’s a fine pop culture relic, featuring real footage from Ali’s most famous bouts. The fighter dominated the screen, opposite Ernest Borgnine and Robert Duvall, proving that no one plays him better than himself.



## 4 When We Were Kings (1996)

Leon Gast’s documentary follows the training and media frenzy in the lead-up to the legendary ‘Rumble in the Jungle’ bout in 1974. Ali skips rope and talks trash about his rival George Foreman, belying the challenge of the fight ahead. With easy charm and humour, Ali overwhelmingly wins the support of the people in Zaire. The sheer force of his personality is nearly as electrifying as his rope-a-dope routine.



## 3 Muhammad and Larry (1980)

For ESPN’s masterful *30 for 30* series, Bradley Kaplan and Albert Maysles followed Ali’s fourth world title attempt, against Larry Holmes in 1980. The champ was already suffering early signs of Parkinson’s – and Holmes hated to hit him; he’d grown up admiring Ali. It’s a painful look at the pride and greed behind the scenes of a fight that shouldn’t have happened – and a humbling portrait of a hero being dragged down to earth.



## 5 I Am Ali (2014)

Documentarian Claire Lewins uses rare recorded audio tracks of Ali’s conversations and musings, offering a peek behind the bravado. The film gives a glimpse of the living legend as a husband, father and friend. Featuring intimate interviews with fellow boxers Mike Tyson and George Foreman, and various family members, the film reconstructs his life from a more personal point of view.



# TROUBLE AT HOME

Rebecca Miller pairs Greta Gerwig with Ethan Hawke in *Maggie's Plan*, a light romantic comedy with echoes of classic screwball

By Abbey Bender

*Maggie's Plan* is a brisk romantic comedy centred around the amusingly interlocked love lives of a trio of New Yorkers: young professional Maggie (Greta Gerwig), John (Ethan Hawke), a scholar of 'ficto-critical anthropology', and Georgette (Julianne Moore), his haughty wife. Maggie begins the film single and determined to become a mother with the help of a sperm donor, but things quickly get complicated when she and John begin an affair, and ultimately end up married with a daughter. It's not long, however, before Maggie realises she has made a mistake and concocts a scheme to try to get John and Georgette back together. Rebecca Miller's fifth film makes fine use of New York settings and Gerwig's naturally quirky demeanour, and has a lighter tone than her previous work as a director: the disturbing fantasy *Angela* (1995); *Personal Velocity* (2002), a portrait of three troubled young women; *The Ballad of Jack and Rose* (2005), about a hippie father bringing up his daughter on a remote island; and *The Private Lives of Pippa Lee* (2009), a dark comic satire about a fiftysomething woman re-evaluating her life. I sat down with the writer-director to discuss motherhood, nightgowns and the joys of *The Philadelphia Story* (1940).

**Abbey Bender:** Were the three leads written with the actors in mind? Maggie is a bit of a transitional role for Greta Gerwig.

**Rebecca Miller:** I didn't initially write it with any particular actors in mind. I rapidly figured out that Julianne Moore was the perfect person and since I was friends with her I was able to get into her mailbox. Then I started to tailor the character to her. With Greta, the lines didn't change; it was more about the way she moved, the tone of her. She really developed an idiosyncratic character. I also did some rewriting for Ethan Hawke. I've been lucky that I've had a lot of time with almost all the lead actors in my movies.

**AB:** I have to ask how the subject of 'ficto-critical anthropology' came about. I hadn't heard of it and, when I googled the phrase, most of what came up was related to your film.

**RM:** That's funny. My friend Barbara Browning is in the performance studies department of New York University. Some of her work intersects with their work. She read a draft of the screenplay, which didn't make any specific mention of it and said, "This really reminds me of ficto-critical anthropology," and I didn't know what it was.

**AB:** You've written the screenplays for all your films. Would you ever consider directing someone else's script?

**RM:** I never say never in that regard. *Maggie's Plan* has been a step, since it was in part an adaptation of somebody else's book [a not yet published novel by Karen Rinaldi]. It's hard for me to divorce directing from writing. Part of the reason I haven't directed somebody else's screenplay yet is I'm curious about character and I write in a way that's labour-intensive in terms



An affair to remember: Greta Gerwig and Ethan Hawke in Rebecca Miller's *Maggie's Plan*

of defining character. Part of the reason I know how to direct my characters is because I know them so well. I don't really know how I would work backwards with someone else's world. I've never done it and it's been a long time now.

**AB:** As I was watching *Maggie's Plan*, I was struck by the depiction of motherhood, particularly the scene of Maggie and her daughter in the bathtub. It seemed like a scene that could've come from your own experience as a mother.

**RM:** With that scene, I wanted it to be more naked even than a love scene, to show how intimate that mother-child relationship can be. I was thinking of Mary Cassatt's paintings of children, and very interested in that maternal dynamic. When she's in the bathtub with her daughter, Maggie is at rest. She doesn't want to do anything else. She's completely there. That's a feeling that I wanted to communicate. And I love bubbles. It took about an hour and a half to get the scene. Greta was so sweet with the girl, very natural.

**AB:** There's cosiness throughout the film. Before the jump into motherhood, in the seduction scene with Maggie and John, she's wearing this long nightgown with lots of buttons.

**RM:** That was totally Greta's idea. She said, "I

*I wanted to find a way of shooting things that could be playful but still feel real. It's real, but not exactly realism*



Rebecca Miller on set

have to have a huge nightgown." It's a challenge to find new ways of seductiveness. We've sort of done it all now. The costume designer, Malgosia Turzanska, exchanged the buttons so we had these very sexy little round pearl buttons that would open easily. The quality's very different from flat buttons. The details were important.


**AB:** And Maggie dresses in an old-fashioned, conservative style, while Georgette is like a chic art gallery owner.

**RM:** I wanted Maggie to be a weird combination: she's a futurist in the way she looks at life, very forward thinking. But she's also old-fashioned in a lot of ways. She's an old-fashioned futurist.

**AB:** A lot of reviews have described this film as screwball. What were some of the influences there? There's also a slight Jane Austen quality with the headstrong young woman trying to set people up.

**RM:** *The Philadelphia Story* is one of my favourites. I like that blend of something that has a strong structure but is also very human. I wasn't consciously thinking about Austen, but it's there: the girl who gets her comeuppance. Her strength is her weakness. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was an influence. I also looked at Eric Rohmer movies. People talk a lot, but they're very seductive. A lot of long takes, two-shots. I looked at *Manhattan* and [Agnès Varda's 1962 film] *Cléo from 5 to 7*. I wanted to find a way of shooting things that could be playful but still feel real. It's real, but not exactly realism. In the end there's a sleight of hand, where you aren't hearing the gears creak every time something happens.

**AB:** How do you see this film fitting in with your other work? There are some similarities with *Personal Velocity*.

**RM:** Yes, they're all women at a critical point in their lives. Each movie has a different type of structure. *Personal Velocity* and *The Private Lives of Pippa Lee* are both looping in time. My other films are more linear. *Maggie's Plan* has a certain kind of magic that I hadn't tried before. It's more of a fantasy, and seems more broadly appealing than other films I've done. 

 **Maggie's Plan** is released in UK cinemas on 8 July and was reviewed in S&S last month



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# THE GEOGRAPHY OF LIGHT



1.

The great Dutch DP Robby Müller's natural light compositions helped define the look of films by Wim Wenders and Jim Jarmusch

## By Nick Roddick

Robby Müller, now aged 76, was the leading European cinematographer of his generation, redefining the look of European and US arthouse cinema through a dozen films with Wim Wenders, four with Jim Jarmusch, two with Lars von Trier and more than 40 with other directors. Von Trier cited him as one of the inspirations for the Dogme 95 movement, but a doctrinaire approach to filmmaking couldn't be further from Müller's method. He believed above all in respecting what he called "the geography of light", feeling his way until he found the frame the film needed.

He worked wherever possible with available light – the twilight scenes in Wenders's *Kings of the Road* (1976) are breathtaking – and took the same approach to interiors. If a room

lit by a fluorescent strip turned everything green – as it notably does in his most beautiful film, *The American Friend* (1977) – Müller insisted on leaving it like that, battling with the labs not to have the colour adjusted.

Because he worked so much in Germany and had an umlaut in his name, many assumed Müller was German. But he was in fact Dutch, born in the former Netherlands colony of Curaçao in 1940 – his father was in the oil business – and training in the 1960s at the then new Amsterdam Film Academy. Fittingly, it is the EYE Filmmuseum in Amsterdam that is currently mounting a magnificent exhibition of his work. Curated by Jaap Guldmond, it assembles the usual showcase objects (scripts, notes, polaroids), then wraps them in a series of glorious screen triptychs – three visually linked scenes from each major film – which demonstrate his approach and those of the directors with whom he collaborated.

**i Master of Light: Robby Müller runs at the EYE Filmmuseum Amsterdam until 4 September. All quotes, direct or otherwise, in the captions are taken from interviews by Claire Pijman and shown in the exhibition**



2.



3.



4.

## 1. Polaroid photo, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 1985

Müller loved to take Polaroids – when scouting locations, or just whenever something caught his eye, which was often. In 2008, on one of many visits to Müller's home, director Steve McQueen first saw the wooden boxes containing the prints, about 2,000 of them, and a selection are shown in the exhibition. Wenders incorporated this fascination into *Alice in the Cities* (1974), at the beginning of which Philip Winter (Rüdiger Vogler) is discovered sitting under the boardwalk taking Polaroids of the empty beach. "Why do they never look like what you see?" he asks. That question is answered by Müller's career, which aimed to ensure the frames of the movie *did* look like what you saw. Or, more precisely, what he saw.

## 2. Kings of the Road

*Kings of the Road* (1976) was the fifth feature Müller shot for Wenders, with a four-month schedule following the border with East Germany. It is the quintessential Wenders road movie, a genre he claims to have invented with Müller while shooting *The Goalkeeper's Fear of the*





5.

*Penalty* (1972), in which a single line in the script became a 12-minute sequence involving a road, a bus, a roadside café and a jukebox. Inspired by the Depression era work of American photographer Walker Evans, the film is shot in black and white and has a kind of ethereal, milky glow. Reacting to what you find en route is rule one of the road movie. Here Robert (Hanns Zischler) responds to a roadside Christ. The shot also demonstrates the difference between the film's protagonists – the travelling projection equipment mechanic Robert and hitchhiker Bruno. Bruno, like Müller, stands back and looks; Robert can't help engaging.

### 3. Paris, Texas

*Paris, Texas* (1984) brought Wenders and Müller back together after a seven-year break. The film

*Von Trier cited him as one of the inspirations for Dogme 95, but a doctrinaire approach couldn't be further from Müller's method*

is a seamless collaboration between Wenders, Müller and composer Ry Cooder. For all his disdain for "camera acrobatics", the opening helicopter shot (which this frame follows) is the triumphant culmination of a series of similar shots, notably the final one in *Alice in the Cities*. Here the frame is not just perfectly composed, with the red cap standing out against the vastness of the desert: the cap also humanises Travis (Harry Dean Stanton), who comes from the desert but is not of the desert. It also prepares us for the softer, borderline sentimental, family-reunion focus of the second half of the film.

### 4. Breaking the Waves

*Breaking the Waves* (1996) and *Dancer in the Dark* (2000) seem, perhaps inevitably with Lars von Trier, to have been created with a certain amount of tension. *Dancer* uses a main camera and – allegedly – 100 of the small digital cameras which had just come on the market. On *Breaking the Waves*, by contrast, the camera is fluid, restless and documentary-like. "Less nice" and "a little more hippy" were among von Trier's comments. One story sums up

the DP's 'magic' touch. In a scene in which Stellan Skarsgård is carried downstairs, Müller wanted to put a blue light in the window. "No blue light," said von Trier. "You won't see it," promised Müller. The blue light was placed; you don't see it; but the shot has that indefinable feel of something just right – a shot which makes sure we see the frame as Müller does.

### 5. Dead Man

*Dead Man* (1995) was Müller's third film with Jarmusch (the final one was 1999's *Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai*, after which Müller felt uncomfortable with the bigger crews Jarmusch was beginning to use). On *Mystery Train* (1989), Müller splashed colour around liberally. But *Dead Man*, like *Down by Law* (1986), was shot in black and white for a very practical reason: in colour, the dense greenery made it hard to pick out the human characters. There are nonetheless a wide range of greys in every frame. Visually stunning, the film is also (with the possible exception of the ending) very simply shot. "Like Miles Davis," says Jarmusch, "Robbie doesn't overplay things." 📺



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# ART IMITATING LIFE



At the '86' festival in Slavutych, a city built to house evacuees from the Chernobyl disaster, I felt the on- and offscreen worlds start to blur



**By Mark Cousins**

In 1984, in *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, a killer in the dreams of teenagers passes through the membrane from nightmare into real

world. In 1985, in Woody Allen's *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, movie star Jeff Daniels walks off screen and into the life of an unemployed waitress. In 1986, Chernobyl Unit 4 exploded. The first two address a common fantasy in which a fictive world invades, or enhances, the real world from which it is viewed, but what has a nuclear disaster at the same time got to do with either?

Maybe nothing, but I have a hunch that I'd like to use this column to think through. It's to do with the relationship between a film and the place where it's seen. Like many kids in the 1940s and 50s, my uncle and his schoolmates would come out of a Hollywood western in the cinema and play cowboys and Indians all the way home. The film events organiser Secret Cinema understands this dam-burst effect the movie world has on the viewer's world by reverse engineering real experiences from movies like *Back to the Future* (1985) and *28 Days Later* (2002). The fact that films are not live makes us want them to be.

I recently went to '86', a festival of film and urbanism in the Ukrainian city of Slavutych, which was built in a hurry after the Chernobyl disaster to house workers from the plant and other survivors from the area. On the trip we entered the 30km and 10km exclusion zones, stood within 50 metres of Unit 4, which has still

to be encased in its completing sarcophagus, and walked around Pripyat, the dormitory city abandoned on the day of the explosion.

Each of these three places was among the most striking was the relationship between them and the films shown in Slavutych's single storey Soviet futurist cinema. The opening film, *The Babushkas of Chernobyl*, precisely depicted the exclusion zones as both Tarkovsky-like abandoned places with ionising Geiger counts and homesteads. Dachas. Grannies who had lived in the area long before the explosion, in some cases burrowed under fences in order to return to live in their homes, raise chickens and grow vegetables.

*The Babushkas of Chernobyl* was about a place we'd just been, a toxic garden of Eden and a homeland for some of the citizens who were watching it. Its hereness was remarkable. Then there was *Atomopolis: Assembling Utopia*, an archive film compiled from footage of six Ukrainian nuclear cities like Pripyat. Watching it in Slavutych, the last Atomograd, was again like Secret Cinema because Slavutych, the last and fastest Soviet city ever built, has many of the same ecological, ideological and planning ambitions. In humanitarian gestures, the Baltic Soviet republics each built a district of the city, thus ensuring that it wasn't uniformly, Sovietly faceless. But pre-Chernobyl utopian ideas are visible everywhere in its planning. There's a Palace of Children's Creativity, a School of Arts and a Sports Zone.

Shift your thoughts from such optimism to the recent war in Ukraine, or further back to the 1932-33 famine which, in just a few months, killed somewhere between 2.5 and 7.5 million

*'The Babushkas of Chernobyl' was about a place we'd just been, a toxic garden and a homeland for some of the citizens watching it*

people. And then shift onwards to another optimism, the spirit of the young people who run the '86' festival, many of whom were issued with a "child affected by Chernobyl" certificate, the 'Ch' generation. Their catalogue says, "The pioneers of ashes – this is what the first micro-organisms colonising the places of fires are called... The pioneers of radioactive ashes... are building a new world on Empire ruins."

Those words clicked for me. That's what we were in and that's what we were seeing on screen. Empire ruins. In a country such as Ukraine, in which the political pendulum has oscillated wildly, a very young town of architectural successes and failures is showing films which fairly-mindedly assess successes and failures in politics, architecture and movies. I didn't quite understand until I got there why they were so keen on my film *I Am Belfast*, but then I realised that its robust sadness and hope harmonised with their ideas.

A film called *Tsvetaeva and Mayakovsky* summed all this up. It's about the two Kiev – or Kyiv to give it its correct name – streets of the title, each named after a poet. We see footage of them being built, again towards the end of the Soviet Union, and brilliant observational imagery of them now, as if they are peep-holes or rock pools. Interwoven there are clips of the 1918 film *The Lady and the Hooligan*, which stars Mayakovsky himself. This old footage is a cattle prod of cheer in the film, from the time before it all went wrong.

Seeing Mayakovsky in the 1910s, and then streets named after him in the 1980s was like seeing Jeff Daniels walk down from the screen in *The Purple Rose of Cairo*. Woody Allen's movie was a fantasy that touched on the Depression; the '86' festival in Slavutych, run by Nadia Parfan and Illia Gladshstein, achieved an even greater interpenetration of on and offscreen worlds, moving because of the way it engages with tragedy, yet is focused and original. It's one of the best examples of live, expanded cinema that I've seen. 📺



DEVELOPMENT TALE

## THE HARD STOP



Living on a prayer: George Amponsah's documentary follows two friends of Mark Duggan, the man whose death at the hands of police sparked the 2011 riots

For George Amponsah's film, the path to the screen led from a shooting in Tottenham via Robert Redford's ranch in Utah

**By Charles Gant**

George Amponsah was making a film about the state of London, refracted through the lives of a couple of young grime artists, when he realised he might be pointing his camera in the wrong direction. It was shortly after the riots of August 2011, and they were walking through some of the most damaged parts of their own south-east London neighbourhood.

Amponsah remarked that it was a shame about the damage to homes and property: "They agreed with me, and then they said, 'Business and property can be replaced, but what about the life of the young man that was killed? That can never be replaced.'"

He was surprised that these aspirational young men – "Two lovely boys; I think they wanted to be the next Tinie Tempah kind of thing" – would identify with Mark Duggan, branded a thug and a gang member in the media after being shot dead by police in Tottenham. That was the spark for Amponsah to take his film, which he had envisaged as an observational long-form documentary, in a different direction.

Months later, at a party in north London,

Amponsah found himself talking to a Tottenham community leader. "I said that I'd love to make a film about the people who were there at the inception of those riots... people who it could be argued had a genuine reason for rioting." She offered to introduce him to two childhood friends of Duggan. The path to *The Hard Stop* had begun.

He met Marcus Knox-Hooke and Kurtis Henville in June 2012 in the canteen of Hammersmith Hospital in west London, where Hooke was working while on remand. They were wary: to them, the media were the enemy. Moreover, "When I turned up, I was on a push bike, with my rucksack. I am sure there was a degree of bemusement. 'Who the hell's this guy? I thought we were meeting some top film director.'"

A 2001 graduate of the documentary directing course at the National Film and Television School, Amponsah went on to make several long-form TV documentaries for strands such as the BBC's *Storyville*, supplementing his income with factual shows including *Danny Dyer's Deadliest Men*.

He asked Knox-Hooke to talk him through the day their friend was killed: "He told the story with great lucidity, but as he spoke he started crying." The filmmaker was struck by his subject's willingness to show vulnerability, and curious about the man whose death sparked the riots: "How could he be considered such a threat by the police and yet so beloved by his community?"

He filmed the pair for five months, investigating their lives and listening to their

testimony. In November 2012, when Knox-Hooke was sent to prison for his role in the riots, he continued with Henville, plus members of Duggan's family – who by now had come to accept and trust him. He was still filming when Knox-Hooke was released from prison in December 2013, and when the verdict of the Duggan inquest – that he had been lawfully killed – was announced in January 2014.

Meanwhile, the film was finding its shape: "The initial inclination to do something more current affairs, more panoramic in scope, that might have an inclination to interview a range of people, that slowly started to get bled out," Amponsah says. "What started to come into focus was the strong suit that we felt we had, which was our access to these two chaps, who grew up with Mark Duggan, and in some way represent him in terms of their personalities and characteristics. I thought, if you can tell something about someone from the company they keep, I guess this investigation is into what kind of character he was, based on what kind of characters are they. Character is revealed through action. Over a period of three years,

*As soon as we started the film with our characters, and the look on Marcus's face, and the anger and the sadness, it worked*



let's see not only what they say, let's see what they do, and find out what they are about.”

A year into the process, Amponsah and producer partner Dionne Walker successfully applied to both the Sundance Doc Fund and Bertha Foundation for development finance. “It was like the cavalry coming over the hill when Sundance got involved,” says Amponsah, who credits Walker for encouraging him down that path, persuasively arguing that America would be interested in the story. Even more importantly, the film was accepted into the Sundance Edit Lab at Robert Redford’s estate in Utah. “For me, it was a life-changing experience,” says Amponsah, who attended with editor Michael Aaglund (*For Those in Peril*). “And it was a game-changer in terms of the direction we were taking the film.”

Lab participants were encouraged to bring the 15 minutes of their film that needed the most work. In the case of *The Hard Stop* – at this point titled *Down by Law* – that was the opening segment. “We couldn’t understand why we couldn’t get it right,” Amponsah says. “To establish the story we felt we needed to start with news archive, explaining the series of events. And then we wanted to say this is a human story about these two chaps who grew up with Mark Duggan on the Broadwater Farm estate, and they loved him, and this is their life, and this is what they go through. Somehow, it just never worked.”

At the Sundance lab, Amponsah met two of his documentary heroes: director Ross McElwee (*Sherman’s March*, 1985) and regular Herzog editor Joe Bini. “And what they said was, ‘What kind of film are you making? If you want to make a film about people, about humanity, then start with the human emotions. You can start the context with archive later on.’ And as soon as we started the film with our characters, and the look on Marcus’s face, and the anger and the sadness, it worked.” Bini is rewarded with an executive producer credit.

The month before the lab, Amponsah and Walker successfully pitched to the BFI Film Fund at the Sheffield Doc/Fest, securing vital finance; they won BFI completion funding a year later. Editor James Devlin, who had also worked on Amponsah’s *The Fighting Spirit* (2007), came on board to give the film a restructure and polish, bringing in some of the film’s most cinematic imagery at the start.

Knox-Hooke and Henville were granted input on the final edit – their concerns were less about their own depiction than about the camera catching people in the background who would not want to be seen. The film appears far from sanitised, revealing two young men who can be quick to anger.

Amponsah says, “The degree of trust these chaps have given, and their willingness to show themselves, warts and all, and not try to polish up their act and convey something that wasn’t the case, propelled me to keep working. Their point was, ‘We’re telling the truth about ourselves, and we’re also telling the truth when we say that Mark was not that guy, waving a gun around and being a threat to society, in such a manner as to deserve to be shot and killed by the police. It just doesn’t add up. It’s not right.’”

**i** *The Hard Stop* is released in UK cinemas on 15 July and is reviewed on page 80

THANKS TO CONSCORE FOR THE NUMBERS DATA

## THE NUMBERS POLISH FILMS

By Charles Gant

Opinions differ on which film deserves the honours for biggest-grossing foreign-language title in the UK and Ireland so far this year – leaving aside Bollywood, that is. Most would agree that the Berlin-set *Victoria*, which has the look and feel of a foreign-language title despite the majority of dialogue being in English, has bragging rights, with £503,000. Purists rejecting *Victoria*’s claim would award the honours to *Son of Saul*, which had reached £496,000 at press time.

But what about a film that has been invisible to most fans of foreign-language cinema: Polish action title *Pitbull: Nowe Porzadki*? This sequel to 2005 Polish hit *Pitbull* has earned an astonishing £500,000 in the UK and Ireland, playing exclusively – or almost exclusively – to the Polish audience here.

The UK release of the film came about more or less by accident. Phoenix Productions, a Chicago-based company presenting cultural events to the city’s large local Polish American population, decided to move into film distribution in the US, identifying the much anticipated *Pitbull* sequel as its first title. It was only when Poles living in the UK started leaving messages on the distributor’s Facebook page, asking about a chance to see it, that Phoenix sought a UK licence on the title, moving quickly to get it into cinemas in mid-April. Explains Phoenix’s Joanna Michalec, “It wasn’t just 10 or 50 people, it was many, many people who actually did want to see it. We just thought we would give it a try.” The company released it in 32 Odeon cinemas, expanding to 62 in week two as audiences in areas not originally covered by the release clamoured to see it. Phoenix followed up with romantic comedy *Planet Single* in May – a smash hit in Poland that topped the box office there over Valentine’s Day weekend.

This isn’t the first time a distributor has popped up to serve the UK’s Polish population – a couple of companies had success with the likes of *Polish Roulette* and *You Are God*



*Pitbull: Nowe Porzadki*

back in 2012. But Phoenix is clearly in it for the long haul. In the first place, Michalec is relocating from Chicago to Dublin (her partner is Irish) this summer, so she can be closer to the action in the UK and Ireland, where box office for Phoenix’s releases has exceeded the US. And second, it is in the process of finalising deals and release dates on five more films, with the first set for early September.

Phoenix has no current plans to take on the likes of Curzon Artificial Eye, which distributed both *Ida* (2013) and *Katyn* (2007), in the Polish-language arthouse space. “Our business model is to stay mainstream and respond to the requests and needs that people actually articulate to us,” explains Michalec, who adds that it is too early to say what impact Britain leaving the EU will have on their business.

The goal for Phoenix is to release a steady stream of films in the UK and Ireland, with the latter so far delivering a healthy 15 per cent of the combined territory’s box-office gross. “Of course we won’t do it blindly, we’ll have to see what titles there are,” says Michalec. “But if there are suitable titles, then our aim is to release a film every two months.”

### POLISH FILMS AT THE UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
Ida	2014	£514,319
Pitbull: Nowe Porzadki	2016	£500,306
You Are God	2012	£277,690
Polish Roulette	2012	£239,812
In Darkness	2012	£233,513
Bogowie	2014	£224,610
Planet Single	2016	£194,989*
Battle of Warsaw	2011	£185,199
Katyn	2009	£161,831
Walesa: Man of Hope	2013	£140,442

\*gross at press time



SHEFFIELD DOC/FEST AND OPEN CITY DOCS FEST

## THE WORLD AT WAR

The humanity on display in the superb *Cameraperson* offered an antidote to the atrocities, racism and violence seen in other recent docs

By Nick Bradshaw

"Reconciliation takes time," notes Padraig O'Malley, after a screening of James Demo's fascinating portrait of him, *The Peacemaker*, at Sheffield Doc/Fest. O'Malley is a gnarled one-man specialist in conflict resolution who has brought together warring parties in conflict zones from Northern Ireland to South Africa. Tracking him more than five years, the film is framed around the insights and paradoxes gleaned from O'Malley's own identity as a recovering alcoholic who now tries to bury his demons in work. Footage from 1975 shows him bringing together Belfast enemies in his Boston bar ("By the end, if you had a Valium and split it with someone, they'd be your friend for life"); more recent footage shows gatherings of O'Malley's roving Forum for Cities in Transition – modelled on the logic of Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and based on his understanding that political strife tends to produce addictive behaviours of its own. (One Jerusalem representative likens the Forum to "a support group of Horror Conflicts Anonymous".) Recovery has to be talked out, different histories deconstructed to find points of shared recognition, O'Malley tells the audience at Sheffield. It's an inter-generational process, too. Ten days before Britain's referendum on Europe, he bemoans the narrow vision of the campaigns: no one is looking at Brexit two or three generations ahead.

The curtain fell on the referendum the following week, in the middle of London's Open City Docs Fest, which had presciently opened with Tadhg O'Sullivan's *The Great Wall*. This visual essay – founded on a reading of Kafka's short parable 'The Great Wall of China' – collates Europe's many citadels of privilege and exclusion, from Spain's fortified Moroccan enclaves to Germany and the City of London, to build what O'Sullivan called a "broad brushstrokes" portrait of the continent, as if summarised 200 years hence, as a place run by white men. The film's momentum and orchestration of words, image and sound were variable, but at its best it was potent and searing.

O'Sullivan said that the oppressive architecture of division and occupation in the West Bank had been his inspiration, before he decided to look for the same thing closer to home. Back in Sheffield I'd caught Shimon Dotan's *The Settlers*, an account of how, given an inch by an irresolutely liberal establishment, a small band of zealous Jewish colonisers drove a festering wedge into Judea and Samaria. Though the film won a Grand Jury Special Mention, I did not care much for its school history-lesson format; but alongside excellent access to key talking heads, it does pack some chilling shots of Greater Israel's science-fictional now, from the cool alien architecture of sequestered settlements to



Fortress Europe: Tadhg O'Sullivan's visual essay *The Great Wall* offers a searing portrait of the continent

the gleaming highways that pipe commuters over dusty valleys from a forgotten century.


More artistically ambitious were two revisitations of horror that led with their soundtracks. I was on the Open City jury that gave its main prize to Ongjen Slavonic's *Depth Two*: beginning with the dredging from the Danube of a truck full of corpses, the film disinters an atrocity from the Kosovo war of 1998-99 and brings it home to the outskirts of Belgrade. A relay of voices relates the experience of a massacre from both sides, but rather than seeing the speakers we comb the incriminated landscape, a palimpsest of beauty and secret horror. There's not a human body in sight for 80 minutes, and the revelation in the end credits that the testimonies we've heard were all taken from Yugoslav war-crimes tribunal depositions adds to the film's eerie sense of remembrance from an afterlife.


Tatiana Huezo's less minimalist *Tempestad* revives the spirit of Kafka in a Mexico that seems to have long lost touch with democratic rectitude. Its two voiceovers, recorded for the film, relate tales of abduction from the inside – a woman 'disappeared' by an unaccountable narco-military-prison complex – and out (the lost daughter of a travelling-circus clown). One is in the past tense, one unresolved; we hang out with the clown and her companions, but the main tale is illustrated with plangent, pregnant snapshots of street life

*Ongjen Slavonic's 'Depth Two' begins with a truck full of corpses before a relay of voices relates the massacre from both sides*

and an overnight coach journey, images that sinuously slip from literalism to figuration as we wend through an indecipherable country.

As a job of imaginative empathy, *Tempestad* made a deeply moving double bill with *Cameraperson*, Kirsten Johnson's Doc/Fest Grand Jury winner. A DP who has shot films from Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) to Laura Poitras's *Citizenfour* (2014), Johnson was surely the filmmaker of the festival this year – as well as the film, she appeared alongside producers Lucy Baxter and Rachel Wexler, and Sophie Mayer at a panel discussion entitled 'Female Trailblazers: New Ways of Working in Media', contributing a blistering call to inclusivity: "Look at yourself, your bearing, your friends, your demands, your choices."

*Cameraperson* starts off like an out-takes scrapbook from Johnson's travels in war zones and beyond (she's shot from Bosnia to Yemen and Afghanistan), then adds layer on layer: self-portrait, as we meet her children and late mother; self-reflexive essay, as we consider the rights and wrongs of making and sharing images, and their interplay with our lives and memories; humanist enquiry, as we look, roam and wonder, not least when Johnson revisits old subjects in Foca, Bosnia. Hard to encapsulate, easy to watch and endlessly meaningful, humble, respectful and dignifying, it was just the sort of cinematic embrace that we need right now. 

 Reports on more Sheffield Doc/Fest films and its Alternate Realities programme are online at [bfi.org.uk/sightandsound](http://bfi.org.uk/sightandsound). *Cameraperson* is one of six Doc/Fest highlights screening at Bertha DocHouse from 22-24 July

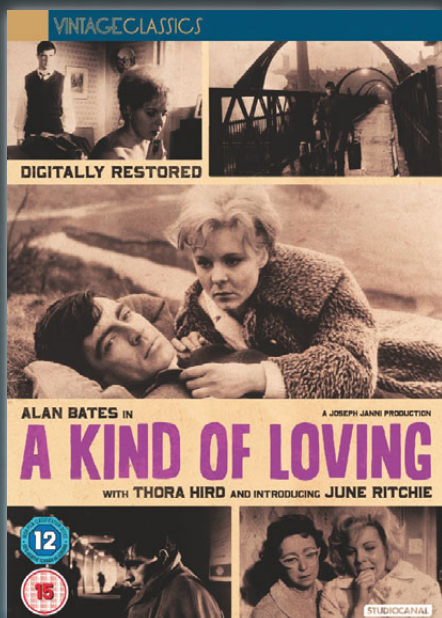


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**STUDIOCANAL**



# CINEMA OF PUNK

## THE FILTH AND THE FURY

To celebrate the 40th anniversary of punk, **Jon Savage**, below, finds echoes in the nihilism and rage that fuel *'Taxi Driver'* and the Ramones' debut album, while over the following pages Sonic Youth's **Thurston Moore** recalls the punk and No Wave cinema of his youth and picks his top 10 punk films, **Will Fowler** explores the transgressive world of Derek Jarman and UK punk cinema, **Don Letts** looks back at the DIY ethic that kickstarted his filmmaking career, **Frances Morgan** surveys riot grrrls on screen, and **Alex Cox** remembers the making of *'Sid and Nancy'*

*"I just wanna go out... and really –  
I really wanna –  
I got some bad ideas in my head. I just –"*  
Robert De Niro as Travis Bickle, *Taxi Driver* (released February 1976)

*"Then I took out my razor blade,  
Then I did what God forbade,  
Now the cops are after me,  
But I proved that I'm no sissy."*  
The Ramones: '53rd & 3rd' (from *Ramones*, released 23 April 1976)

Forty years since its American release, *Taxi Driver* now seems to mark a pivotal moment in American and indeed Western culture: a warning of the final foreclosure on 70s hedonism and an uncanny prediction of the alienated loner – the dark side of the cowboy/vigilante figure – who has since become a terrorist archetype. Previous films had dealt with the vigilante trope – most notably the Dirty Harry series (1971-) and Michael Winner's *Death Wish* (1974) – but these avengers operated from within society, within the structures of marriage or police work. They had something to lose, even if it was just a badge.

In contrast, Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) is completely alienated, if not damned: "Loneliness has followed me my whole life, everywhere. In bars, in cars, sidewalks, stores, everywhere. There's no escape. I am God's lonely

man." His diatribes against the decadence of New York – scripted, with perfect economy, by Paul Schrader – have become justly famous, but then the alternative on offer is just as bleak: as Wizard (Peter Boyle), the nearest thing he has to a confidant, tells him, "I envy you your youth. Go on, get laid, get drunk. Do anything. You got no choice, anyway. I mean, we're all fucked."

Living alone in a squalid apartment, Bickle is desperate for connection. But he can only see women as Madonnas or whores. In the film's most excruciating scene, he takes the fragrant Betsy (Cybill Shepherd) to the cinema, but it's a sex education/soft porn film. She is, quite rightly, revolted, but he doesn't get it, at all. After treating the Madonna like a whore, he tries to rescue an actual prostitute – Iris (Jodie Foster) – with devastating results. Even here his fantasies fail: the icy cool Dirty Harry figure quick-drawing in the mirror is replaced by a messy, drawn-out gun battle in a tenement hall – a squalid bloodbath.

A massive success at the time – with takings estimated at \$21 million by the end of 1976 from a budget of \$1.3 million – Martin Scorsese's direction of *Taxi Driver* resembles a fever dream with the city of New York cast as its real star: a glistening, flickering, neon-saturated nightmare. The streets are filled with people promenading, jostling, fighting, shouting, selling things and selling themselves. With hoardings and illuminated signs proclaiming serial killers and twisted sex (*The Texas Chain Saw Massacre* meets *Anita: Swedish Nymphet*) the environment

**NO FUTURE**  
Robert De Niro as Travis Bickle in Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver* (1976), a fever dream in which the city of New York is the star: a glistening, flickering, neon-saturated nightmare









➔ is a chaotic charnel house of desire that promises everything and delivers absolutely nothing.

All the buttons are being pressed: mayhem, murder, sex as the ultimate expression of consumerism. The whole thing has got out of control. Bickle presents himself as a Yukio Mishima-type figure bent on purification – not only of society but of the self – but he is a reflection of that degraded environment: popping pills, eating junk food, transcending the rhythms of nature in his night-time wanderings. He is all out of kilter, and even his grand finale is botched: he ends up killing, not the presidential candidate Charles Palantine – a plot line that reflects the script's origin in the story of Arthur Bremer, the would-be assassin of George Wallace – but three no-mark gangsters, hustlers, pimps.

*Taxi Driver* is all of a piece: it's pretty much perfect, even down to the circular dream ending. What's interesting now is just how the film's overlay of nihilism ("We're all fucked") rings all kinds of different bells: in his brutally cropped hair and square shades, Bickle prophesies punk. The fact that he writes down his thoughts – like Bremer and the killers who would follow – gives the film a strong rationale, if not ideology: Bickle's eventual rampage is not a random spasm but a course of action that is thought through, that is understandable given the film's logic, and that was being reflected elsewhere in New York at the time.

Between the film's preparation, script editing, production and eventual release in 1975-76, the Ramones were busy recording: at first two sets of demos in 1975, then – in February 1976, almost exactly on the film's US premiere – the 14 tracks that appeared on their first album, *Ramones*. On the monochrome album cover, the group was pictured – by photographer Roberta Bayley – in a graffiti-strewn Bowery back alley looking like delinquents and hustlers: inside, the record was saturated in a New York sensibility given an explicit location on the

*'Ramones' had no truck with hippie pieties. The record's lyrics mashed up extremist acronyms with horror references, totalitarian imagery and deep disgust*

key track '53rd & 3rd' – a murder fantasy prompted by sexual shame and guilt.

Between them, the Ramones recordings and the *Taxi Driver* production process encompassed the following events: the fall of Saigon in April 1975 and thus the ending of the Vietnam War (it's no accident that Bickle and the protagonist of '53rd & 3rd' are Viet vets); two separate assassination attempts on President Ford in September 1975, by Charles Manson acolyte Squeaky Fromme and Sara Jane Moore; and the speech by Ford refusing to allow federal assistance to spare the city of New York from bankruptcy, paraphrased in the immortal *Daily News* headline 'Ford to City: Drop Dead'.

Like several other inner cities that would incubate the new aesthetic – Cleveland, London, Paris – New York was a forgotten town in those days. In late 1975, the future film director Mary Harron was living on 14th Street in Manhattan: "I remember standing at windows, looking out over the Lower East Side, and feeling that the whole city was infested, and crumbling, but wonderful. There was nihilism in the atmosphere. Longing to die. This sounds pretentious, but part of the feeling of living in New York at that time was this longing for oblivion, that you were about to disintegrate, go the way of the city. Yet that was something almost mystically wonderful."

In late 1975, she interviewed the Ramones for the first issue of *Punk* magazine: "I had no idea whether it was good or bad, whether I liked it or not, except that it was completely extraordinary, I'd never seen anything like it. I couldn't believe people were doing this. The dumb brattiness: 'Beat on the brat with a baseball bat' – this at a time when it was, what? King Crimson. It was comic, and yet you're in a real place, you want to do something real, so you're in a situation where they could be real, they could be genuinely delinquent. It had an edge to it. And they looked dumb-smart, smart-dumb."

Like *Taxi Driver*, *Ramones* had no truck with hippie

**YOU LOOKIN' AT ME?**  
The Mohawk and shades sported by Travis Bickle in *Taxi Driver* (above right) were a clear precursor of the punk aesthetic, fuelled by the same nihilism that energised the Ramones (above)





peties: that era was over. The record's lyrics mashed up extremist acronyms – the CIA, the SLA (the Symbionese Liberation Army) – with horror references (*The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*), totalitarian imagery ("I'm a shock trooper in a stupor") and a deep sense of disgust ("Don't it make you feel sick?"). Both displayed a right-wing polemic against liberals and the flotsam of commercialised hippie culture: against hang loose and let it all hang out, coke, suede and waterbeds. That had led to a kind of decadence, not just sexual and social, but – almost even worse – that of artistic self-indulgence.

Both *Taxi Driver* and *Ramones* were wound up tight: stripped, hostile, confrontational, deliberately shocking. Even so, the film made enough of the compromises – in particular the ending that suggested redemption even though it was, to the careful viewer, completely unresolved – that allowed it to become successful: it was number one at the US box office for three weeks in February 1976, and for two more in late March and early April. In contrast, the Ramones's debut stalled at number 111 on the Billboard chart and did not go gold until 2014, yet its impact on British punk was incalculable after their visit in summer 1976: after *Ramones*, the acceleration.

*Taxi Driver* was released in the UK in September 1976, several months into the British punk scene, already kickstarted by the Sex Pistols – another stripped, confrontational aesthetic that mirrored hard times. Both New York artefacts now seem extraordinarily prescient: if *Ramones* changed the sound of rock music, then *Taxi Driver* presaged the arrival of the taxi-driving serial killer – David Berkowitz, the Son of Sam, who committed his first murder in July 1976. In May 1977, he sent a letter to the *New York Post* that read like a Travis Bickle out-take: "Hello from the gutters of N.Y.C. which are filled with dog manure, vomit, stale wine, urine and blood."

Both rehearsed the right-wing politics that would overtake the West by the end of 1980. As Harron says

about New York punk, "People needed to say something that negative, there was something liberating about that negativity. It was so hard and cold, and glitter was the end of something, and this was a search-and-destroy aesthetic." The Ramones themselves included a mixture of political positions – singer Joey Ramone was left wing, guitarist Johnny Ramone a rabid Republican – but their insistence on telling uncomfortable truths led them to an extreme position that was quickly softened in their attempts for mainstream acceptance.

If *Ramones* accelerated the pace of first wave punk, then *Taxi Driver* gave it the look that spread throughout the UK and the US from 1979 on. Bickle's descent is marked by his hair: first, a moderately short 70s cut, then a brutally cropped effort and finally – as he goes out to kill – a full-blown Mohawk/Mohican. The links to the US military and Native Americans were deliberate: this was a ceremonial war cut, meant to mark the warrior and the outcast. Seen in 1976 before its more general take-up, against the flares and deco patterns of the crowd at the Palantine rally, Bickle's Mohawk looked profoundly weird and separate, if not actually deranged.

Lacking even the Ramones' cartoony black humour, *Taxi Driver* is even more brutal. It still casts a dark spell. Bickle now appears as the first mainstream cultural appearance of a line that has continued through the Oklahoma bomber Timothy McVeigh, the Unabomber, any number of school shooters and beyond. He is a reminder – from almost an adult lifetime ago – that extreme alienation can turn outward into a cosmic rage: "Listen, you fuckers, you screw-heads. Here is a man who would not take it anymore. A man who stood up against the scum... the cunts, the dogs, the filth, the shit. Here is someone who stood up. Here is – you're dead." 📢



'Punk on Film', a retrospective of punk cinema curated by Don Letts, will screen at the BFI Southbank, London, throughout August

*Travis Bickle is completely alienated, if not damned. The environment is a chaotic charnel house of desire that promises everything and delivers nothing*



## GANGS OF NEW YORK

From Amos Poe's footage of bands at CBGBs to *No Wave*, Nick Zedd and the sleaze cinema of 42nd street, New York film culture in the 70s and early 80s was vivid, raw and in your face

By Thurston Moore

The first punk film I remember seeing was something Patti Smith showed when she played one of her progressively larger shows in New York. It was split-screen footage of her and the band that somebody had shot at the time – somebody said Robert Mapplethorpe was involved with it. It was really affecting. And David Bowie in '74, '75, on the *Station to Station* tour, he showed Luis Buñuel's *Un chien andalou* [1928]. I'd never seen a surrealist film, I mean what kid in the USA, living in a rural area would have access to French surrealist cinema? I remember that being completely mind-blowing.

But what you started hearing about in New York, in '78, '79, was films being made starring people from the community of bands. The first I recall was Amos Poe – he had a film called *The Foreigner* [1978]. I remember seeing a little card-sized ad in the *Village Voice*. 'Amos Poe's *The Foreigner*, featuring Deborah Harry'. Most film ads would have quotes from magazines saying, "This is brilliant" or "This is a work of art", his had a quote saying, "Depressing, dot dot dot." I thought, you *have* to go see this film. I couldn't understand why the music in Amos's *The Blank Generation* [1976] was not synchronised to the images, so that film was a little hard to process. But Amos had shot a lot of those bands really early on, around 1975, so he captured a lot of the interior of CBGBs at that time – that wonderful over-blown shot of Richard Hell just staring into the white-hot light of the camera. If you talk to Amos he was just trying to do Godard movies in downtown New York – sometimes it would work, sometime it would be this interminable experience.

I remember seeing *Letters to Dad* [1979], by Beth B and Scott B, where they had people like Lydia Lunch and Arto Lindsay, musicians from DNA, Teenage Jesus, the Contortions, reading these letters people had written to Jim Jones, the cult leader. Just face on into the camera lens, reading in a very downtown New York, disaffected, too-cool-for-school way. The premiere of that was at Beth and Scott B's loft, where I also remember seeing *Black Box* [1979], where Lydia Lunch plays a dominatrix, and thinking, "I don't know if these are punk films, but they *are* punks in these films!"



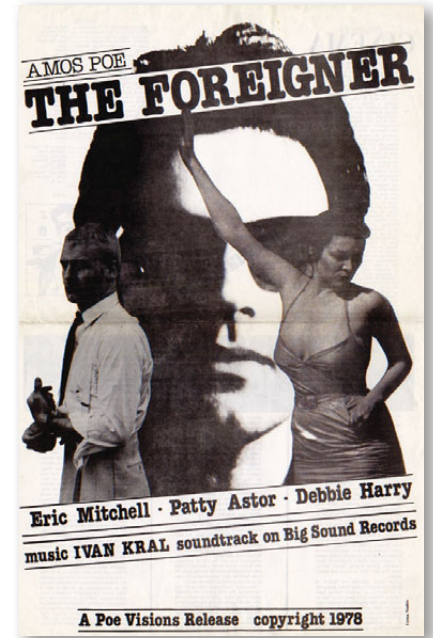
Bands apart: Amos Poe's *The Blank Generation* (1976) and *The Foreigner* (1978)

Amos Poe was great at using the Lower East Side for his romantic backdrops. And James Nares when he makes *Rome '78* [1978] – he sees downtown Manhattan as this kingdom of decrepitude and equates it with Rome during Caesar's era. You see the actors looking askance at placards of dialogue – it's just so obvious, they're pretending not to read, but they're reading. But it's purposeful, in its amusement, in its attitude that we don't have time to rehearse. "We don't have money. Time is money." It was recognising that and just enjoying that reality for what it was. They were so off-the-cuff, their expediency and energy that came from poverty, and it really did encapsulate the time period.

When Bette Gordon's film *Variety* [1983] played, that was acclaimed by serious film critics. Jim Hoberman and the *Village Voice* film critics at the time had to deal with No Wave cinema because it was really happening and really self-promotional, with flyers all around New York. These critics were excited by the fact there were these rogue filmmakers in their backyard. Vivienne Dick and Bette



Bette Gordon's *Variety* (1983)



Gordon certainly, maybe Beth and Scott B, Eric Mitchell, James Nares, must have taken some inspiration from European cinema, art cinema from the Warhol period, Jonas Mekas's anthology. They must have seen themselves as part of that lineage.

I'm not sure if Nick Zedd [author of the 1985 *Cinema of Transgression Manifesto*] did though, that's why I think he was the first pure New York City punk filmmaker. He really did just come out of being a disaffected alien. He saw some of this work and liked the economics of it, which were nil, but he didn't really like the storylines, the narratives to him were just banal. He wanted to make something explosive, that had more to do with the Dead Boys than the Contortions. He was completely disregarded by that film community because he didn't have the same sort of intellectual perversity that they had, he was a bit more thuggish possibly, but he was also his own brilliant person. I remember his first films, like *Geek Maggot Bingo* [1983], being completely terrible. There were always politics between the art world and a lot of the players of No Wave. A lot of people, be it James Chance, Lydia Lunch, Eric Mitchell, coming into this scene, they weren't really academics. They were intellectual, but they weren't coming out of university, and they certainly weren't art school. There was always a bit of a situation between what was considered the schooled, elite, Soho crowd and the rowdier, more street, East Village vibe – there was a bit of a discrepancy, a bit of a war.

The *Cinema of Transgression* films would be shown wherever Nick could get someone to show them. The basement of the Pyramid Club was where you'd see a lot of Richard Kern's new stuff. I remember Nick Zedd



having some film thing at 8BC; he had his friend rip open the screen and come running out naked into the audience screaming, and it was both stupid and brilliant at the same time. It was really funny. There was always humour in No Wave. Lydia Lunch, as volatile as she can be in her language, she's basically a comedian. Her great hero is [stand-up comic] Phyllis Diller, she's told me this personally. She'll be extremely serious, but there's always this underlying acceptance of the absurdity of the situation, seeing the humour in it. That was a strain that went all through No Wave as music, but also as film, it always had this sense of the ridiculous. And that's part of the lineage of Warhol and the Theatre of the Absurd. Richard Foreman's plays were really important to a lot of people at the time.

There were slasher films and torture films being presented on the sleaze film circuit on 42nd St at the time, and that was like the new pornography: body-count slasher films. They reflected the psychology of the time, where killing and death overtake sleazy sex. For people like Kern and Zedd, those films on the sleaze circuit had as much intrinsic punk value as No Wave cinema. They were also very cheap, and had a certain absurdity that they found really appealing, so they wanted to make art films that reflected that interest. One of the great films is *Goodbye 42nd St* [1986], where Kern takes his camera and moves along 42nd St, which was trying to go through a change, trying to get rid of these cinemas and turn it into Disneyland. So being aware of this he took his camera and would stop in

*Nick Zedd had his friend rip open the screen and run naked into the audience, screaming. It was both stupid and brilliant*

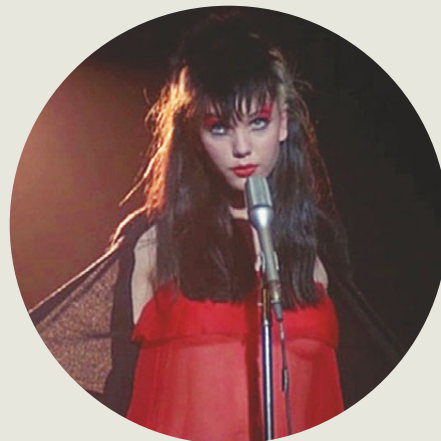
front of one of these scummy cinemas and imagine what was going on on screen. He would stage something like his friend's head exploding, some savage thing, and I thought what a fucking brilliant concept that was.

You would go up there with Richard Kern and Casandra Stark and see *The Evil Dead* [1981] with two other movies, and the majority of the audience would be street people smoking reefer and talking, like they were in some living room somewhere, drinking beer and wine and responding to the film. "Better look out motherfucker! Oh shit!" Some slasher thing would happen. "Oh my god, that's so fucked, I won't sleep tonight!" That was part of the environment at the time, and it was a little dangerous and weird, but you knew you were there to experience that. That's all gone now, it's over. ☹

Thurston Moore was talking to Sam Davies

## THURSTON MOORE'S TOP 10 PUNK ROCK FILMS

**1 Ladies and Gentlemen, The Fabulous Stains (Lou Adler, 1982)**  
Ex-record label honcho Lou Adler's gritty take on working class girl punks, led by a young Diane Lane (right), enchanting the world and blowing rival band The Looters (played by former Sex Pistols turned Professionals Steve Jones and Paul Cook, and The Clash's Paul Simonon) off the stage.



in Medellín, Colombia, finding a voice through savage hardcore punk rock, the only expression in a crumbling, desperate environment.

**2 Pussy Riot: A Punk Prayer (Mike Lerner, Maxim Pozdorovkin, 2013)**  
A great doc on one of the most fascinating punk protest groups in history, where the members bring their noise activism to the fascist altar and get burned with no apologies.

**3 Lovedolls Superstar (David Markey, 1986)**  
David Markey's masterpiece, a sequel to the already crazed *Desperate Teenage Lovedolls* (1984) but with far more punk mania. Featuring an astounding performance by Steve McDonald of Redd Kross as a hippie turned hardcore punker and his brother Jeff's star-turn as a Gene Simmons-infected freak assassinating an asking-for-it Bruce Springsteen.

**4 The Filth and the Fury (Julien Temple, 2000)**  
Julien Temple's Sex Pistols doc made in response to his own messed-up Malcolm McLaren-orchestrated *Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* film from 1980. A hilarious and knowingly myopic retrospect of one of punk rock's most significant bands.

**5 Rodrigo D: No Futuro (Victor Gaviria, 1990)**  
The harsh tale of a teenager



**6 We Jam Econo: The Story of the Minutemen (Tim Irwin, 2005)**  
Loving documentary about the Minutemen, who were one of the most unique and awesome punk bands from early 80s southern California.

**7 We Are the Best! (Lukas Moodysson, 2013)**  
Beautiful take by Lukas Moodysson of three very young Swedish girls finding truth and identity in punk rock.

**8 SLC Punk! (James Merendino, 1986)**  
Very believable, and humorous, account of what it must've been like to be an alienated punk enthusiast in the middle of nowhere USA (Salt Lake City, Utah) in the early 80s.

**9 Shellshock Rock (John T. Davis, 1979)**  
This 1979 doc on the early days of Northern Ireland punk (Rudi, The Outcasts, The Undertones et al) is the first of three directed by John T. Davis. I first saw this in a tiny space in New York's East Village in '79 and haven't seen it since, but my memory is of a strange land where leather-jacketed punks dealt with opposition and weird weather but all with hearts full of passion.

**10 Control (Anton Corbijn, 2007)**  
Anton Corbijn's sensitive portrait of Ian Curtis (left) and Joy Division which, like no other film, captures what exactly it is like to play your first gig with all the anxious energy alive on stage.





Cash from chaos: Julien Temple's 1980 film tells the story of the rise and fall of the Sex Pistols from the perspective of their manager Malcolm McLaren

## ENGLAND'S DREAMING

*The punk DIY ethic that encouraged people to learn three chords and form a band in the UK also galvanised wannabe filmmakers, who grabbed a super 8 camera and started shooting*

**By William Fowler**

Punk was primarily about attitude, clothes and music, and yet, because of its attendant role in image making, film also hovered in the background. Malcolm McLaren had famously been inspired by the example of the Teddy boys, and no doubt also by a famous 1956 screening of *Blackboard Jungle* in Elephant and Castle in London, at which the Teddy boys, their energies fired up by the film and its music, tore up the cinema's seats. McLaren saw that cinema audiences were at once captive and yet potentially explosive if sufficiently primed, and he drew

on this powerful live/non-live spectacle situation when planning his own early 70s art school, situationist-like film about people shopping on Oxford Street – a project that ultimately went unfinished. McLaren was a prankster, and despite the 'year zero' attitude of the new scene, he also looked back and understood the powerful relationship between music and film, evoking the rock musicals of, among others, The Beatles in his ongoing plans. McLaren always aimed for maximum impact, but he also understood that his grand scheme needed to be captured in a film for it to endure in the long term – not so much in reality but in our minds.

Which is, or was, a paradox. The UK punk story is so wrapped up in the mythology of '76-'77 that its history is both fixed and occluded. Punk US-style is loose and less wedded to a primal moment, but in the UK we got post-punk almost immediately. That made things difficult for McLaren when chasing his Sex Pistols movie dream – events simply outpaced him. Courting potential directors for his film, he spoke first to exploitation favourites Russ Meyer and Pete

Walker, and ultimately to Julien Temple – after the Pistols had split up. It was Temple of course who eventually did steer McLaren's vision of a Sex Pistols movie to the screen in *The Great Rock 'n' Roll Swindle* (1980).

By way of contrast, on the ground in '76-'77, many UK filmmakers seemed intuitively to understand the situation and documented bands, events, friends, fellow punks – and Rastas – whenever they could, sucking up and preserving each moment before it disappeared. Don Letts, then the house DJ at punk venue The Roxy, is most famous for working on super 8 and filming gigs and backstage events, ultimately bringing the footage together in *The Punk Rock Movie* (1978), but filmmaker Captain Zip also worked in the medium and filmed the daily scene on King's Road: punks parade up and down the street across several of Zip's compilation films, shot as vivid home-movie footage in an attempt to capture and make more real this strange phenomenon of which he was active participant. The films can be viewed on BFI Player, and are fascinating for the way they show the

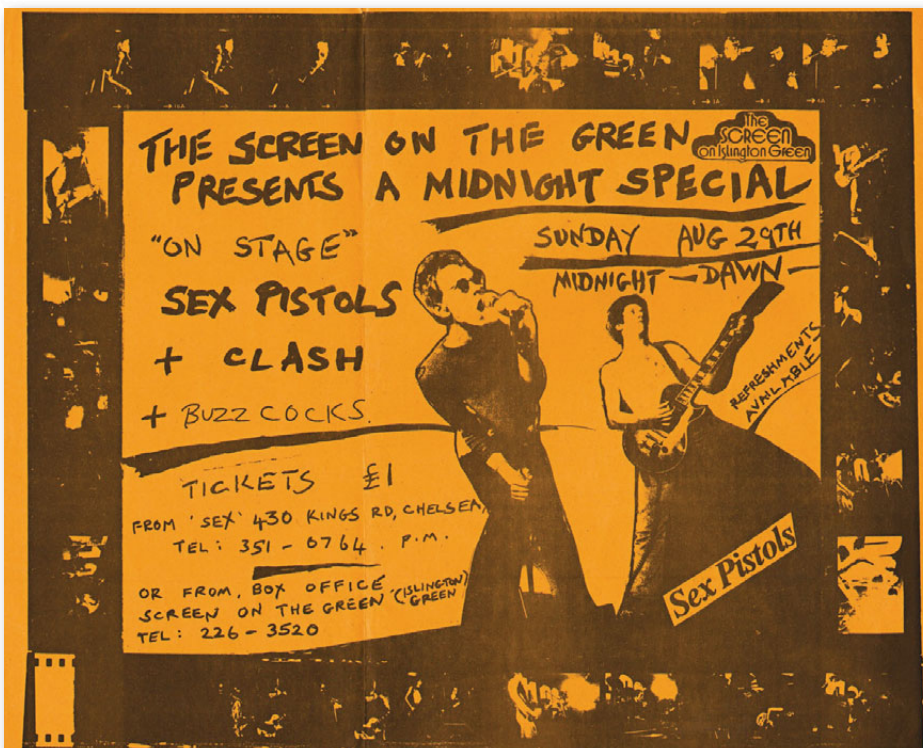


authentic truth of the early punk look, before the codified fashions and styles took hold.

Ever the showman, McLaren also attempted to agitate the latent energy between film and music at an event that has gone down in punk lore. Pushing novelty and raw experience to the fore, he orchestrated a cinema event/music gig crossover at the Screen on the Green cinema in Angel, Islington, in August 1976. On the bill was Kenneth Anger's *Magick Lantern Cycle*, before The Clash, the Buzzcocks and then the Sex Pistols took to the stage. It was like something from the UFO Club in the 1960s, which had incubated the likes of Pink Floyd and Soft Machine, but it also further yoked punk – as it was then – to the gay underground, while prefacing the power of image and style that was so integral to punk through the inclusion of Anger's leather-boys-esque *Scorpio Rising* (1964), a film about outsiders, bikers, leather and pin-ups.

The Screen on the Green event certainly had an impact on young punk and filmmaker-to-be John Maybury, who had been to several early Pistols gigs, notably one in Notre Dame Hall off Leicester Square. Maybury, himself gay, said, "It made me completely enamoured of that kind of moving image, which was non-narrative, abstract, erotic, often highly erotic, dynamic and powerful." Like Don Letts and Captain Zip, Maybury worked on super 8, moving from frontal Warhol-esque performance films to increasingly elaborate, multi-projection psychodramas. The films are brilliant, and feature notable punk faces – among the earliest, *Glamour Is an Asset* (1978) features Jordan, McLaren's iconic shop assistant at the Sex boutique on King's Road; then for the essayistic, existential gender-fuck *Court of Miracles* (1982) – a film that truly stretches and pushes what super 8 can do – Maybury cast Siouxsie Sioux. Maybury was immersed in the scene and close friends with fellow super 8 champion Derek Jarman, providing sets and costumes for Jarman's punk feature *Jubilee* (1978), a movie shot with rough visceral imagination, on the ground, as the chaos unfolded. Vivienne Westwood, another punk architect, was unimpressed with the film, making a T-shirt stating: "I ain't insecure enough, nor enough of a voyeur to get off watching a gay boy jerk off through the titillation of his masochistic tremblings." But though she also attacked it as boring, she subsequently withdrew her criticism and praised both Jarman and *Jubilee* later in life.

With the arrival of fellow travellers Richard Heslop, Holly Warburton, Cerith Wyn Evans and others, something of a scene was created around super 8 as the 80s arrived. And yet with all the hang-ups around the British narrative, can we call this punk? The



Anger is an energy: a flyer for the August 1976 all-nighter at Islington's Screen on the Green

moment paralleled similar developments in New York with Richard Kern, Nick Zedd, Lydia Lunch and Beth and Scott B, and also in Berlin, where the likes of Christoph Doering worked alongside German band Einstürzende Neubauten. Other groupings start to emerge: the 'Cinema of Transgression', 'industrial'. But super 8 itself suited punk. It was direct, immediate and the colours – projected from reversal originals – were punchy. It was also easy to use; cartridges slotted into the camera with ease and no traditional cinematographic skills – eg the ability to use and read a light meter – were required. For those so inclined it was like the famous punk maxim taken from

*Super 8 suited punk. It was direct, immediate and the colours were punchy. It was also easy to use*



John Maybury's *Court of Miracles* (1982)

the *Sideburns* fanzine: "This is a chord, this is another, this is a third, now form a band."

What united several filmmakers, and was most overt in Maybury's early output, was the focus on the interrelationship between image and identity; identification being both scrutinised and undermined through a complex weave of manipulated projections and semi-naked bodies. These films were different to those of Letts and Captain Zip – not shot on the street or on location, but in studios and highly artificial scenarios. In Maybury's films gender is presented as a construct and reality is partial – or indeed 'queered'. The films took the popular avant-garde side of punk, with its literal safety-pinning together of clothes, meaning and body boundaries, to the next level. It was reborn, and it supported and gave context to the identity politics of the 1980s, giving voice to marginalised figures in anti-normative fashion: female filmmakers, gay filmmakers, black filmmakers. As Maybury said in 1981: "Our criteria for visual response has been permanently altered – sophisticated advertising and slick promotional videos have picked up the line where the surrealists and [German] expressionists left it. Experimentation side-tracked up the blind alley of structuralism, which effectively murdered underground film. I see my films as an amateur-hour alternative to this academic death. By choosing the domestic medium of super 8 and using the simplest camera techniques I hope to reinstate the innocence of the experiment." His attitude was punk too. ©





The needle and the damage done: Chloe Webb and Gary Oldman in *Sid and Nancy*

## FRIENDS IN HIGH PLACES

*On the eve of a 30th anniversary rerelease, the director of *Sid and Nancy* reflects on its status as a cult film – and argues that it should ultimately be judged as a horrific love story*

By Alex Cox

The first time I saw something I could identify as punk, it was 1976 in Bristol. I spotted a guy with a leather jacket which had '1976' emblazoned on the back. Interesting. There was obviously a political statement within that, even if I wasn't quite equipped at that point to know what it was, though we did have a punk band in Bristol, The Cortinas. And it was shortly after that I got a Fulbright scholarship to be a graduate student in film at UCLA [University of California Los Angeles], which had its own punk scene that happened just a little after the UK. So I was into people like X, Fear, The Plugz. We had visiting bands, too, like Devo, and I saw The Clash twice, which was amazing. I also remember a friend of mine turning up with a double-A-side single by Sid Vicious, 'Cosh the Driver' coupled with 'My Way', and I was very much sold on that.

The Brits tended to disdain the American punks, because they thought they were all middle class kids with nothing to complain about – which was a bit like the pot calling the kettle black. LA was more male-

dominated – in the UK girls played a much larger part – but everybody had the same intention: it wasn't just about music, it was about creating an alternative lifestyle, to be tribal, to bring down society as we know it. They didn't quite succeed, but it's coming...

I'd never met Sid Vicious or Nancy Spungen, and the Sex Pistols split up before they reached LA so I never got to see them play. We tried to create as authentic a picture of their relationship as we could, so I did a lot of interviews with, for instance, the Bromley Contingent, people who knew Sid through other channels, and even John Lydon himself. If you go to the National Media Museum in Bradford, there's a big box of my archives, and within that two very fat notebooks where I wrote up all the interviews.

The other genesis for it was that I'd met a producer who was seriously trying to get going on a Sid and Nancy film starring Rupert Everett and Madonna. That could not be allowed, so really our inspiration was to stop that happening by getting our own version into production first.

If you want to see a good record of the punk scene, look at Julien Temple's films because he was really embedded within it. In our film the punk scene was peripheral because what we did was to focus on these two characters. And anyway I was from Liverpool, I didn't

*Essentially, *Sid and Nancy* betrayed the punk movement. They should have been out there on the barricades*

know London, I couldn't know if I'd gotten it right anyway. I was more familiar with the LA scene, so when we shot the London punks doing their dance, it was the southern Californian mosh-pit rather than very British pogo-ing. Interestingly, when he read the script John Lydon suggested that we go away from authenticity and put our own stamp on it. He thought Drew Schofield, who was playing him, should use his own Scouse accent, which started me thinking about how far we could take it. Why not make Sid a girl and cast Sandra Bernhard? We didn't go that way... maybe we should have done.

The most important scene in the film, from the perspective of [co-screenwriter] Abbe Wool and myself, was in the methadone clinic, where Sy Richardson plays the guy who won't hand over their dose of methadone until he's delivered a lecture about how they're screwing up. Essentially, Sid and Nancy betrayed the punk movement. They should have been out there on the barricades, but instead they became another example of junkie rock stars getting high in a hotel room. That's what we wanted to say, how they'd become such a disappointment to punk, but because the film got deeper and deeper into their horrible little world, everything outside them got a bit lost. The last we see John Lydon, he's in the corner of some club, fading away. All that explains a sort of misunderstanding in the UK, where it was taken to be a film about the punk scene. The reception in America, where it was viewed as a horrific love story, was closer to our intentions.

I don't really watch my own old films, unlike Ronald Reagan, who sat in the White House and reran *Knute Rockne – All American* [1940] again and again. That way madness lies – though I must say, of my own films *Sid and Nancy* is the one I'd be most critical of. Gary Oldman and Chloe Webb both gave fantastic performances – he's gone on to have a fantastic career – but the ending really should be harder, and that message that they're fools who've wasted their lives and betrayed the music should come through much stronger so nobody could miss it.

I'm not sure why it's been picked up for 30th anniversary rerelease. It's like *Repo Man* [1984] in that respect, it reminds people of a certain time in their lives. I guess for older audiences it's about that era when they did drugs and stayed out all night. There's a certain sentimentality about all that, so it'll be interesting to see if a younger generation will be impressed in the same way. I'd expect them to be a little more distanced, and perhaps take it a bit more critically. ☹

**i** Alex Cox was talking to Trevor Johnston. *Sid and Nancy* is rereleased in UK cinemas on 5 August and on DVD/Blu-ray from 29 August



# SCISSORS AND AN ATTITUDE

*As the resident DJ at the heart of the punk scene at London's Roxy, proximity to the likes of John Lydon and Joe Strummer offered a terrific opportunity to kickstart a filmmaking career*

**By Don Letts**

Back in the early 70s I saw a film called *The Harder They Come* [1972], Jamaica's most famous film, and I was not only entertained by it, but inspired and informed. I was first-generation British black, I was looking for clues and insights not only to my culture but to what I had to bring to the party. This film made me start thinking I'd like to express myself visually. In the early 70s, for a black man, this was a ridiculous idea: the film business was very much an old boys' network.

It was only with the advent of punk rock in the mid-70s, with that DIY ethic, that I was able to reinvent myself and become Don Letts the filmmaker, because when my white mates were picking up guitars, such was the energy that I wanted to pick up something too. I picked up a super 8 movie camera, and started filming the things that were turning me on. I didn't read the instructions to the goddamn thing, I literally picked it up and started shooting. I was the DJ at [key punk venue in Covent Garden] The Roxy, and the DJ booth was right next to the stage, which was very useful. Then when I went on the road, I built up a bit of a reputation; if I wanted to get closer to a band, people would give me a bit of space.

I remember reading in the *NME*, it must've been in '76, "Don Letts is making a punk rock film." I thought, "That's a good idea, I'll call it a film." Because at that point I was just documenting. So I stuck it all together in my apartment and it was screened at the ICA. And that was my entry into the film world. From there it was a hop and a skip as I became friends with punk bands: when they became famous or signed up, they asked me to make their music videos. And my career developed from there – I leapt from making music videos to making documentaries.

The thing I showed at the ICA was very rough and ready, but under the umbrella of punk you could get away with things like that. There were no titles, I spliced it together at home with scissors and sellotape. But what I realised was, it wasn't about technical ability, it was about the idea, and the idea was more important than the execution. A good idea attempted is better than a bad idea perfected. I don't care if it's a RED camera



**Join the club: Don Letts with Andrew Czezowski, founder of The Roxy, in 1977**

or a super 8 or a piece of toilet paper, a good idea will cut through bad editing, bad acting, lighting, all of it. At that time, super 8 to develop was roughly £20 for three minutes. A fortune back then! Best training I ever had, because it really made me think about what I was doing, unlike today when you can buy gigabytes of memory for a few quid. A better training than going to film school, for £20. The other thing about super 8 cartridges: they only ran for three minutes. Which was very fortunate because all the punk songs were over in three minutes anyway, so it was the perfect medium for punk rock.

The first person to ask me to make a video was John Lydon, for 'Public Image' [1978], and in those days they had a film union, the ACTT. And because of this I wasn't allowed to operate a camera, I couldn't do anything. So I had to get what they called a ghost director, and sit in a chair. It was because of the union situation that I ended up being a director, it forced me into a situation where I had to take a seat and direct operations. Music videos were a great way to learn my craft. It was there I learned about tracking shots – I had seen tracking shots in Powell and Pressburger, but how complicated



**Take me to the river: from Don Letts's video for The Clash's single 'London Calling'**



they are to do, I had no idea until I made a video. From there I made The Clash's 'London Calling' video. The PiL video was in a studio, very controlled. For 'London Calling' I thought, "Let's try something a bit more adventurous, let's shoot something on the River Thames." The Clash are on a pier, I've got the camera on a boat. I can't swim, the boat keeps drifting past the pier, and I didn't realise there was a 15-foot difference in the tides. So by the time I've worked all this out, it was pissing down with rain, and it was night-time, but it turned out to be the best luck I ever had, because it gave the video an atmosphere and a production value way beyond what the budget was.

The birth of rock 'n' roll was a punk moment, I think hip-hop was black punk rock, reggae was Jamaican punk rock – it was the *lack* of what they had, not what they had. If you look at art, Marcel Duchamp's urinal is pretty punk rock, isn't it? Woody Guthrie's punk rock: "This machine kills fascists." But it's important that people understand what punk attitude's about, that there's a lineage, a tradition. I stumbled into Malcolm McLaren

*Developing super 8 cost £20 for three minutes. Best training I ever had, because it made me think about what I was doing*

very early, maybe '72, '73, before punk was even spoken of, and it was him who made me understand that these different subcultures I was so enamoured with didn't happen in isolation. There was this connection, and he made me realise that if I had an idea, and I was brave enough, I could be part of this thing. He made me realise it wasn't just about music. I always tell people the reason punk was such a complete subculture was it inspired filmmakers, photographers, journalists, designers. There was punk rock cinema, punk photography, punk design, but it wasn't formulated, we were making it up as we went along. It's only in hindsight now that people are connecting all the dots. ☺

**Don Letts was talking to Sam Davies**



Letts filming with The Clash's Joe Strummer

## THE GOLDEN GRRRLS

*In the riot grrrl bands that took off in the north-west US in the early 90s, the spirit of punk took a feminist, media-literate turn – and spawned a clutch of smart underground movies*

**By Frances Morgan**

Riot grrrl – the North American political and musical movement with roots in the Pacific Northwest – has been much documented on film in recent years with *The Punk Singer* (2013), Sini Anderson's documentary about musician and feminist activist Kathleen Hanna, the most recent example. What distinguishes riot grrrl films from more typical documents of music subcultures is that there's little sense of a musical trajectory from underground to mainstream when talking about bands such as Bikini Kill, Hanna's first group. Instead, music is a catalyst, the most immediate vehicle for a third-wave feminist ethos expressed not only in songs but also fanzines, art, film and video.

*The Punk Singer* and other documentaries, such as Abby Moser's *Grrrl Love and Revolution: Riot Grrrl NYC* and Amy Oden's *From the Back of the Room* (both 2011), perform a useful function in historicising and solidifying women's roles in musical undergrounds. *From the Back of the Room*, in particular, diverges from the relatively concise, location-specific, media-friendly story of early-90s riot grrrl with its articulate participants and manifestos, putting the movement in the wider context of women's involvement in DIY music. But documentaries consisting of gig footage and talking heads aren't the only way this burst of energy should be remembered on film. None of riot grrrl's key figures fit into the format of a rock hagiography. With artists such as Hanna – a photography student – writers Allison Wolfe, Tobi Vail and Molly Neuman and filmmaker Sadie Benning (daughter of James), as well as more peripheral supporters such as Jennifer Reeves and Miranda July, this was a media-literate milieu whose visual activities included experimental feminist filmmaking, part of a lineage that arguably began with artists such as Carolee Schneemann in the 1960s. In 1994, Jill Reiter cast Kathleen Hanna in an unfinished, fragmentary feature, *In Search of Margo-Go*, about a young woman looking for Margot Olavarria, bassist with 80s new wave group the Go-Gos. Sarah Jacobson was also involved in that film: her feature *Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore* was an underground hit in 1997.



*From the Back of the Room* (2011)



*I Was a Teenage Serial Killer* (1993)



*Mary Jane's Not a Virgin Anymore* (1997)

Made when Jacobson was still in her mid-twenties, *Mary Jane* is a tender, funny, gawky film with little of the rage of her 1993 short *I Was a Teenage Serial Killer*; it's less insular artist's film than adjunct to or dialogue with the grunge-lite indie romances of the era. It is also that rare thing, a coming-of-age film that feels entirely uncynical. The story of an 18-year-old girl exploring sex and relationships with the help of her workmates in an arthouse cinema, it exploits neither its subjects nor their subculture. The film's music, much of which is diegetic, rarely provides an opportunity for music-video-style emotional set pieces; instead, it's part of the fabric of the characters' lives, cued up rapidly at parties and on car stereos and discussed in passing. It helps that the music's so well chosen: within the first ten minutes, you hear





**Musician and feminist activist Kathleen Hanna, subject of *The Punk Singer* (2013)**

AFI's 'Cruise Control', Mudhoney's 'Flat Out Fucked' and 'Quick Mechanic' by pop-punk band The Loudmouths, whose Beth Ramona Allen appears as Mary Jane's musician friend Ericka, a kind, tough-talking bisexual girl with flames tattooed up her arms. We first see her casually recounting tales of tour debauchery; later, she reassures the inexperienced Mary Jane by telling her how she wrote a song about losing her virginity called 'Lame Fuck'. "Those were the worst two minutes of my life," she sings. A party scene (Amebix posters on the walls, girls in striped tights doing bong hits) is soundtracked almost exclusively with female voices, though not the better known riot grrrl groups: here you get the garage-punk of Red Aunts and the rasp and yawp of Kat Bjelland's Babes In Toyland. Extreme music is part of young

*Extreme music is part of young women's everyday experience; it doesn't need to be framed in a particular politics to be so*

women's everyday experience; it doesn't need to be framed in a particular politics to be so.

*Mary Jane's Not A Virgin Anymore* is a valuable sidenote to the recent documentaries on riot grrrl because, as fiction, it shows this particular musical and political subculture as a continuum, a strand running through young people's lives, not a discrete movement you could join or leave or put a label on. The film's male characters are sympathetic too: not only shy, straight-edge skater Ryan and gay cinema boss Dave but beer-chugging

Matt and Steve, too, are refugees from mainstream society (represented by Mary Jane's awful college friends and a cameo by former Dead Kennedys frontman Jello Biafra as a puritanical evangelist). What ties it the most to its political moment is the commitment to speaking out: Mary Jane, Ericka and another friend, Grace, all speak with a slightly formal, didactic tone concerning rape, drug use, unplanned pregnancy and masturbation, passages that threaten to disrupt the jokey flow of the film. But this aspect of *Mary Jane*, which is overall a sunny, optimistic movie, has travelled remarkably well, its earnestness a breath of fresh air almost two decades later, as well as being a corrective to the idea that riot grrrl's concerns were purely theoretical or aesthetic, unconnected to young women's real lives.

It is also what links the film to *I Was A Teenage Serial Killer*. Despite a John Waters-like dark humour, this lo-fi female revenge film, made just after Jacobson finished her studies with American underground filmmaker George Kuchar, aches with damage and ugliness, as Kristin Calabrese offs various men, including her drunk, ranting father and, at the end of the film, reveals her background of abuse – the story she has never been able to tell and has instead subsumed into violence. This move to testify, especially to experiences of sexual assault, is one of the essential but now less acknowledged elements of riot grrrl. The film's music is brief but haunting: first, a female voice raps over the chorus of Cypress Hill's 'How I Could Just Kill a Man'; then the music on Calabrese's car stereo is Charles Manson's 'Eyes of a Dreamer'. The song that ends the film, the searing 'My Secret' by Olympia band Heavens to Betsy, encapsulates the relationship between the underground music and film of the time. The 1992 single by Sleater-Kinney guitarist Corin Tucker's first band is a confessional and an invective, detailing childhood sexual abuse and adult rage with visceral clarity. "These words are a threat to you," chants Tucker. "My secret is... I want you dead, I want you dead, I want you dead."

The neutering of punk rock into a series of nostalgically rebellious poses in film means that gestures like this are often forgotten, although Jacobson herself is not. She died from cancer in 2004 aged 32, with a film about the making of Lou Adler's *Ladies and Gentlemen, The Fabulous Stains* (1982) in the works. A foundation set up in her name now supports independent female filmmakers in the US. *Mary Jane* is still viewed as something of a landmark in 90s DIY filmmaking, but in true underground style is only available to watch on YouTube. 📺  
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# FUNNY GAMES

*A group of men on a fishing trip on a luxury yacht in the Aegean Sea decide to have a competition to determine which of them is the best, in Greek director Athina Rachel Tsangari's witty, affectionate satire of modern masculinity*

By Adam Nayman

**Chevalier** begins with an image vividly of our time: the Aegean Sea, a site of drama dating back to the Trojan War and beyond, framed by cinematographer Christos Karamanis against the face of a cliff, a composition describing a secluded cove. Look hard enough and tiny forms become visible, fishermen splashing harmlessly around the vast expanse of water. "I never set out to make a movie about something," says the film's Greek director and co-writer Athina Rachel Tsangari. "It's not a conscious decision. It's completely intuitive, and it usually starts with one or two images. One was the first shot, these specks of life emerging from this archetypal, barren landscape. I didn't know what it was about, or what they were, or why, but I needed to figure it out, to interrogate it. And the next one was men peeling off their skin, literally."

*Chevalier*'s elemental overture is a bit of a feint from a filmmaker who likes playing funny games with her characters and her audience. Having established the divers as minuscule figures within an ancient landscape – viewed with the detached gaze of an indifferent god – and approximating the idea of skin-shedding by showing them wriggling out of their jet-black wetsuits, Tsangari slowly shifts both her camera and the film's conceptual framework into close-up mode. Its subjects identified, *Chevalier* clambers aboard a modest luxury vessel where we find the all-male yachting party reclining with leisure-class ease.

"The third [image I started with] was a boring one, a bunch of people talking around a table," explains Tsangari, whose second feature *Attenberg* (2010) established and perfected her distinctly dramatic-anthropological approach. (Its scenes of people gleefully regressing into animal behaviour were simultaneously hilarious and unsettling). "It was a big challenge for me, because I've never really filmed people talking. I'm obsessed with landscapes, with landscape films, bodies in space – the Antonioni way, the Herzog way, the Pasolini way, the Godard way. To me, the challenge for this new film was the act of speech, with no escape from it."

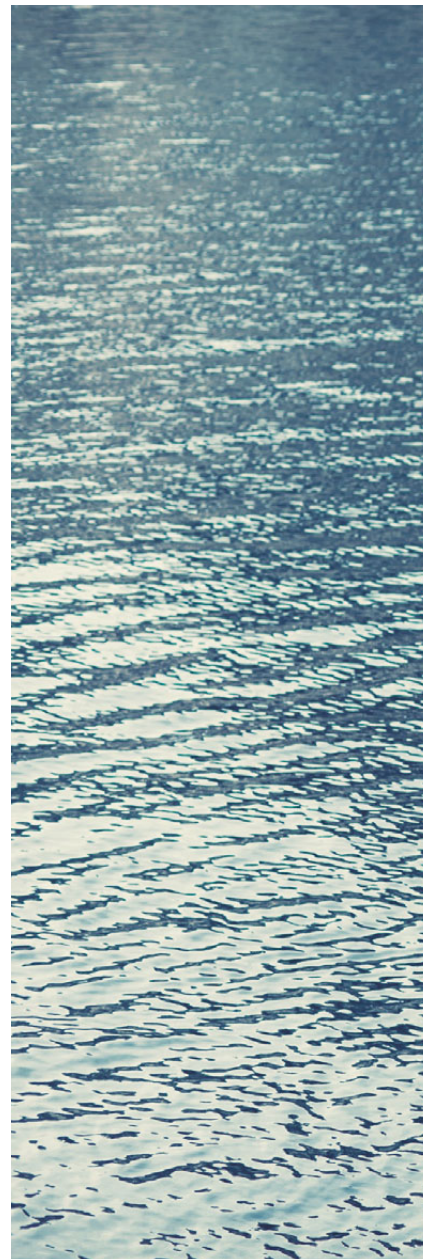
With echoes of Sartre's blackly comic 1944 play, *Huis clos* – about three damned souls locked in a room for eternity – the film crams its characters together in a confined space, then steps back to observe the clash of egos and

emotions that unfurl. But unlike Sartre – or Buñuel, whose *The Exterminating Angel* (1962) is another possible model for *Chevalier* – Tsangari doesn't pull any meta-physical tricks to keep them stuck in place. One of the film's subtlest points is that roughly half the action takes place while the boat is docked at its home base. The journey home has been completed, but the ongoing game/social experiment the men have devised as a diversion to pass the time becomes so compelling that they can't bring themselves to go ashore – their odyssey, such as it is, will go on until there is only one epic hero.

The name of that game is 'Chevalier', or 'the best in general' – a competition in which the six men (all more or less middle-aged and prosperous) judge each other's abilities (and, it's implied, personal value) in areas ranging from seaworthiness to sleeping posture to erecting IKEA shelves. (There is also, inevitably, a dick-measuring contest, which outdoes anything Judd Apatow could have conceived.) The prize: a chevalier signet ring which, in this context, takes on an invaluable aura. The sheer arbitrariness of the different contests is not lost on the participants, but the desire to save face and gain status proves more powerful than common sense, with little flare-ups of pride, jealousy and anger threatening to explode the combustible atmosphere.

"It would have been extremely easy for us, and for the audience, to figure out a hero from the beginning," explains Tsangari, who wrote the film with Efthymis Filippou. "But we opted against that because *Chevalier* is about power dynamics, and the irrelevance of supremacy. Each one of them is wonderful and terrible at the same time – we all are. Giving it a more Brechtian or Beckettian framework – that's where I come from, that distancing style. It would have been easy to say, 'This is our guy, and he's going to get the ring,' or not. It was an experiment as I was working with the actors in terms of dynamics. There was a winner in the script, but the character had to earn it through the actor, and vice versa."

Tsangari's need to have her actors 'earn it' means that *Chevalier* was a film created in close collaboration with her cast. Her willingness to integrate ideas developed in rehearsal (during which whole scenes were rewritten) into the finished process indicates an adventurous spirit belied – but not contradicted – by her film's glittering



*I'm obsessed with landscapes, bodies in space – the Antonioni way, the Herzog way, the Pasolini way. To me, the challenge for this new film was having no escape from speech*





**ALL AT SEA**  
The competitive games the six men play in Athina Rachel Tsangari's *Chevalier* range from seaworthiness to sleeping posture to erecting IKEA shelves – with the inevitable dick-measuring contest thrown in



surfaces: *Chevalier* is an experiment with a pristine finish. “When we started rehearsing, we followed some rules. No emoting, for example. The actors really got into the game, and some of the contests came from them. One of the rehearsal rules was that every one of them had to suggest their own contest.”

Although she grew up in Greece, Tsangari went to film school in the United States – in Texas, where she struck up a friendship with director Richard Linklater; she was an actor and producer on his *Before Midnight* (2013). “I left Greece in my early twenties having had zero contact with filmmaking,” she says. “I returned from the US in my early thirties having produced and directed my first feature [the low-fi sci-fi *The Slow Business of Going*, 2000], which originated as my Masters thesis at the University of Texas at Austin.” In the absence of a national film school in Greece, Tsangari says she gravitated towards other young filmmakers frustrated with the country’s lack of industrial infrastructure, including Yorgos Lanthimos. “I met Yorgos during the preparations for the Athens Olympics opening ceremony, and he asked me to help him make *Kinetta* [2005],” she recalls. “We put together a tiny crew, tiny cast, tiny budget; we shot on super 16 Fuji. It was super-efficient





because Yorgos knew exactly what he wanted. We continued making our films under Haos Film, the company that editor/writer Matt Johnson and I had originally founded back in Texas. We were inspired by the American indies' practice in the 70s, what we called 'The C Trinity': Cassavetes, Coppola, Corman."

Cassavetes is a clear inspiration for both Tsangari's process and the affectionate yet bruising point of view she holds towards her characters. "*Husbands* [1970] is one of my favourite movies," she says. "It was so brave of Cassavetes to make a movie about men who are so vulnerable – such softies, such lunatics. There's something sincere about that. *Husbands* is painful to watch, it has problems as a film, but it's essentially a film about friendship."

The issue of male friendship lurks underneath all the alpha-male posturing on board, mostly in the form of designated beta Dmitris (Makis Papadimitriou), whose humble love for collecting pebbles ("This one is almost a perfect sphere," he boasts to his unimpressed roommate) and fragile body language make him endearing in a way that's more apparent to the audience than his peers. More suspenseful than the outcome of the 'Chevalier' competition is whether or not this meek man will get the respect and camaraderie he so obviously craves, and the other actors – including matinee-handsome ex-Greek pop idol Sakis Rouvas as the oddly anodyne Christos, and Panos Koronis as the affable Yorgos – are adept at projecting deep insecurities in the space of a perfectly turned glance. "I'm always casting for faces," explains Tsangari. "It's not beautiful faces or ugly faces, or eccentric faces... just faces that reflect personalities. When Efthymis and I wrote the characters, we drew them broadly – they were all basic types. It took me a long time to complete the cast, and find the right balance between strong personalities."

*Chevalier's* faces really are amazing – as they are in Cassavetes – and as the film probes them with an intense fascination that shades over into deep compassion, *Chevalier* reveals itself as a warmer, more humane film than its initial reception at festivals (including London, where it won Best Film) as a withering critique of masculinity would indicate. Tsangari says that she doesn't appreciate claims that her film is making fun of its characters. "I love the men in *Chevalier*," she insists. "I adore them. I get sad when people don't see them that way, as if I didn't manage to express my love for them. Their competitiveness is something that happens every day, in the smallest of things."

Whatever Tsangari's intentions, *Chevalier* is a work that wears its provocations proudly on its sleeve. "I had two press days at the Locarno Film Festival after the premiere when I had to answer the same questions over and over again, like: 'Why does a woman make a movie about men?'," Tsangari says. "I find it strange that people ask me about being a woman making a movie about men. The history of cinema is men photographing women. So why do I get asked this question?"

The temptation to extrapolate some larger commentary from the behind-closed-doors set-up of *Chevalier* is evident, and Tsangari seems to invite it with her ending, which provides a slant rhyme with the first shot: the men returning to the civilisation they'd abandoned for a holiday, and – by possible implication – to the



*It's all a bit crass. If an American makes a buddy movie, it's about buddies, but if a Greek makes a buddy movie, it must be about national identity*

(un)natural habitat that cultivates all their status-happy vanity. Tsangari's final images may show us a particularly shimmering version of Athens, but the director rejects the idea that she's crafting any kind of civic or national portrait. "The Greek crisis is becoming a sort of fetishistic, exportable commodity for artists," she says. "It makes it all a bit crass. It's as if we as filmmakers are expected to be actively exporting a product, and that product is the national tragedy of Greece."

"I find the conversation around 'national cinema' quite reductive, pigeonholing, and in essence, latently colonialist," she adds. "To a certain extent, we've all been programmed and trained by our cultures. Partly, *Chevalier* is about the programming of the bourgeois male. But that doesn't mean that it's necessarily and exclusively a movie about the Greek middle class in crisis. It's about anyone of that age, sex, and income bracket – and it could be anywhere in the world. If an American makes a buddy movie, it's about buddies, humans, the guy or gal next door, the jokes; but if a Greek makes a buddy movie, it must be about national identity. And if a female makes a buddy movie, then she must be mocking masculinity."

Tsangari has spoken in the past about not wanting to be lumped in with the so-called Greek New Wave, even though *Attenberg*, almost as much as Yorgos Lanthimos's *Dogtooth* (2009) – a film she produced – is widely considered the fount of the movement. "The only real thing that tied all the weirdos of the so-called 'Greek weird wave' is that we tore ourselves away from the breast of the mother-state – the studio – and renegotiated that relationship on new terms." A decade later with arts funding dwindling, the new guard of Greek filmmakers in their twenties and thirties are super-active and determined. The ironic thing, Tsangari says, is that for all the attention these and other Greek films have received – culminating in the transnational production and release of Lanthimos's *The Lobster* (2015), starring Colin Farrell and Rachel Weisz – they're ignored on their home turf. "All of our films, the recent films, the Greek New Wave, such as it is, it's difficult to get people to see them in Greece," Tsangari says. "It's hard to make movies in your own language for an audience that doesn't give a damn."

**COMING TO AMERICA**  
Although she grew up in Greece, Athina Rachel Tsangari went to film school in Texas where she was inspired by 1970s American indie cinema and what she calls 'The C Trinity': Corman, Cassavetes and Coppola



**Chevalier is released in UK cinemas on 22 July and is reviewed on page 75**



# new films



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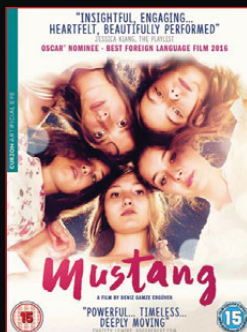


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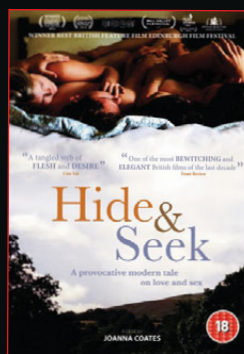


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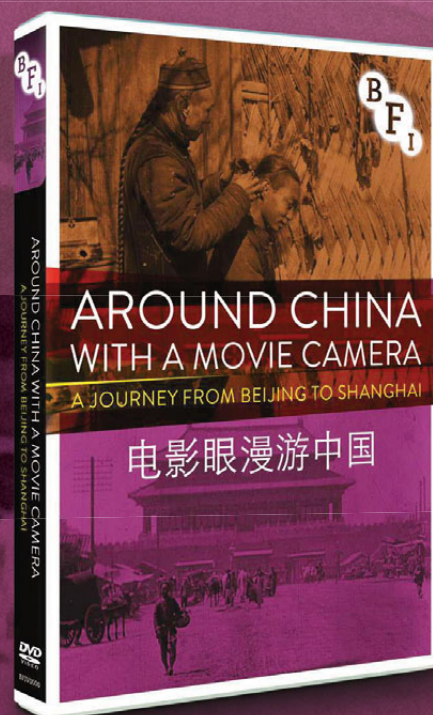


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# BLUE VALENTINE

*The line separating fact from fiction is deliberately blurred in Robert Budreau's biopic of jazz legend Chet Baker, 'Born to Be Blue', a film that seeks to remain true to the improvisational spirit of the music rather than simply offering a blow-by-blow account of the trumpeter's tragic life*

**By Trevor Johnston**

**Photographs alone go some way** to capturing the infernal trajectory of jazz trumpet legend Chet Baker. At the beginning, there's beatific early 50s Chet, the quiffed angel with a horn, the so-called 'James Dean of jazz', immortalised in William Claxton's iconic photos and album covers, whose portrayal of a dreamboat Californian romantic played out in the breezy, woozy rush of his pre-heroin playing and vocals. At the other extreme, images of the deeply lined living wraith that was the 80s Chet, make it bracingly plain how decades of scrambling from fix to fix, gig to gig, had taken a physical toll on him – even as his best nights on the bandstand poured out a desolate stoicism and yearning which cut far deeper than the effortless panache of his gilded youth.

When he fell to his death from an Amsterdam hotel window in 1988, under still mysterious circumstances, he was just 58 years old, and like so many other needle-tracked jazzers his reputation could so easily have faded from view. Somehow though, Chet's distinctive allure, melding high-cheekboned glamour and transgressive doom, has continued to attract succeeding generations of listeners – and, of course, Hollywood's long been sniffing

around too. Why wouldn't it? After all, Chet is the beautiful and the damned rolled into one.

So, while Bruce Weber captured the ravaged, fiftysomething Chet in his artfully melancholy 1988 doc *Let's Get Lost*, the fabled notion of a Baker biopic is something that's done the rounds for years. For a time, Leonardo DiCaprio was talked of, and a Richard Linklater project with the younger Ethan Hawke nearly made it off the ground. Unexpectedly though, a relatively unheralded French-Canadian filmmaker, Robert Budreau, has been the man to get the Chet story on screen. It's something he's achieved by focusing on a pivotal period in the late 60s for Baker's career, and by grasping the opportunity of casting Hawke at a time when his now seasoned former boyishness proves a perfect match for a mid-period Baker, here neither the heart-throb of yore, nor the raggedy festival-circuit survivor yet to come.

In *Born to Be Blue*, Baker's doing cold turkey in an Italian prison cell, only to be sprung by Hollywood financial muscle and whisked back stateside so this bad boy of cool jazz can star in a film version of his own nefarious exploits. Soon he's falling for the co-star (Carmen Ejogo)





playing his ex-wife, an encounter which turns out to have more staying power than the usual on-set liaison, remaining together even after Baker's had his teeth kicked in during a brutal gang assault. No longer able to sound a trumpet, his very future is in jeopardy, with no guarantee he'll ever perform again. Will the challenge of making a comeback see him returning to form and getting back on the needle, even at the expense of this new relationship that has brought so much to his life?

Put like that it sounds more than a little schematic, and perhaps it is, but Budreau's screenplay not only finds a moment in Baker's life which offers a built-in narrative turning point, but also drills down into the very essence of Chet, where personal vulnerability and the creative demands on a jazz musician point him down the path towards substance misuse. At once this promises an enabling renewal of his musical confidence even as it corrodes the rest of his personal life: it's man, music and junk in a kind of toxic alchemy. Where so many music biopics feel slightly synthetic – none more so than *Get on Up* (2014), which reduced the James Brown story to a PG-13 cop-out – this one, modest in scale though it might be, definitely has a ring of uncomfortable truth about it. Which is decidedly ironic, given that Budreau has freely invented much of the story detail marking its path.

The film-within-a-film, for instance, never existed, even though Italian movie mogul Dino De Laurentiis reportedly once suggested it to Chet, which makes Ejogo's character evidently an invention too. The title's insistence notwithstanding, minor standard *Born to Be Blue* was never a key part of Chet's repertoire, and while it's modern soundalike Kevin Turcotte we hear on the soundtrack rather than a single note of Chet himself, the incident in which Baker had his face bashed in did actually happen. Mind you, every time he recounted it to interviewers, the details changed: a black gang, a white gang, irate dealers, persons unknown... what really happened we'll never know, and the same could be said for most viewers attempting to untangle *Born to Be Blue*.

James Gavin's admirably thorough, if cumulatively depressing biography *Deep in a Dream: The Long Night of Chet Baker* is recommended reading in this respect, but now's also a good time to summon Budreau himself down the line from his Toronto base to justify his choices. "Our goal was really to use Chet Baker as a way to tell a more universal story about the choices an artist has to make," says the 41-year-old from London, Ontario, who first gained attention when his debut feature *That Beautiful Somewhere* was nominated for a Canadian Genie award in 2006. "It also encompasses issues to do with addiction and race, with the conflict between love and art. I

certainly never imagined it as this niche jazz film, because it was about larger themes. Bringing in a mix of fact and fiction was a way of reimagining the material yet somehow staying true to the jazz spirit."

His words certainly ring true, since the film's non-judgemental take on drug use thankfully avoids any preachy cautionary-tale overlay (rather pointless given Baker's decades-long relationship with heroin), while flagging up the fierce Miles Davis as Chet's jazz nemesis authentically tackles the historical musical rivalry between the cool white guys on the West Coast and the hotter black jazz bands back east, as well as signalling still-relevant questions to do with white appropriation of African-American musical forms. Still, none of that addresses quite how the audience is supposed to distinguish fact from fiction in Budreau's movie.

"Yeah, I know that the Dino De Laurentiis movie never actually happened, but it seemed like such a fascinating idea to pretend that it did," he says. "Because right away seeing the film-within-a-film put us into the territory of celluloid as a basically untrustworthy world. Biopics aren't necessarily there to tell you the truth about their subject because filmmakers, for the sake of a good story, are always making up bits and pieces and inventing characters. I thought it would be fun if we were upfront about that, and we've definitely put the question out there as to what's real and what's a construct, because Carmen's character is playing his ex-wife in the movie and he falls for her in real life all over again."

So does it matter whether or not people know her character is your invention?

"Does it affect your enjoyment of *Raging Bull* [1980] when you know the Joe Pesci character never existed, that he was a composite? In the end, you really can't put signposts in to say this is this and that is that because you lose the tone. It's going to affect the feeling".

Indeed, in the event, any debate over the film's expository particulars really matters a lot less than the compelling human insight into Chet's ongoing travails delivered by Hawke's truly mesmerising central performance. Convincing with the horn in his hands, affecting when his singing captures Baker's own intimate, confessional style, he also manages to convey the depths of Baker's complex self-esteem issues while working within the undemonstrative strictures of Chet's notoriously laid-back demeanour. Budreau can't help but be effusive in his praise: "He'd lived with Chet for a long time, and in a funny way the film-within-the-film here gave him the chance at last to play Chet in his twenties as he would have done had the Linklater film gone ahead. What was so impressive was that he's actually an actor who gets so much out of his dialogue, but he couldn't fall back on that here because Chet really wasn't so talkative. He had to use a different vocal timbre, he had all the trumpet preparation and he needed to record the songs before we did the shoot. He was a bit scared of the prospect beforehand, but all that time he'd put in, all that thinking about the character, really paid off. It was all there. It was just effortless.

"It's something that happens to some male actors in their forties. They've got that professional maturity, they've got the life experience, and it really enables them to have a renaissance. That's certainly what's happening with Ethan right now, and it was great for us. We were so lucky to get him at that moment in his life when he really was firing on all cylinders." 📞

**i** *Born to Be Blue* is released in UK cinemas on 25 July and is reviewed on page 73

**MASTER OF INVENTION**  
In Robert Budreau's *Born to Be Blue* Ethan Hawke's Chet Baker (above) stars in a film version of his own life and falls in love with the co-star (Carmen Ejogo, below) who is playing his ex-wife





# WAYS OF SEEING: THE CHANGING SHAPE OF CINEMA DISTRIBUTION

*Technological changes have transformed the way we watch movies, with profound knock-on effects for film distributors and exhibitors. Below **Geoffrey Macnab** examines how these shifts are affecting the film industry, while over the following pages **Amanda Randall** flies the flag for community cinemas, **Nick Pinkerton** addresses the need for a new critical discourse to accommodate the revolution in film culture and **Kate Taylor** seeks succour in cinephile activism*

There is a phrase that film distributors, big and small, once used as if it was axiomatic: “Theatrical is the engine that drives the ancillary sales.” They meant that a run in cinemas, whether profitable or not, was essential in making a film visible to the public and giving it an afterlife on television or DVD. That truism doesn’t make so much sense today because cinemas are becoming ever more selective about which films they will show, and companies such as the US streaming giant Netflix are bypassing the theatrical release altogether.

It is intriguing and a little chilling how changes in the film business mirror those in Western economies generally. In a world of increasing income inequality, the gap between the haves and the have-nots continues to grow and the middle class is being squeezed. The same polarisation exists in cinema. Global box-office and video-on-demand (VOD) revenues are both rising. Last year was an instructive one – box-office records were broken at the same time that Netflix launched its internet TV network globally. However, the same Hollywood blockbusters are topping the charts in every territory. On the one hand, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015) has box-office revenues of more than \$2 billion; on the other, the British press has been full of stories about the disastrous releases of such films as *Misconduct*, starring Al Pacino and Anthony Hopkins, and *Momentum*, starring Olga Kurylenko, James Purefoy and Morgan Freeman – the former made £97 at the UK box office on its opening weekend while the latter managed only £46. These were mid-range movies with big stars attached, not low-budget Danny Dyer films. They may have gained their limited cinema outings primarily to get reviews and generate publicity so that audiences would discover them on VOD – but their financial performances were still dire.

At this year’s Cannes Film Festival, the talk in the trade papers was all about the ‘disruptors’ – those players who seem determined to wreck the time-honoured methods of distribution and exhibition. It’s worth recalling here what those methods were, and in some places still are. The business has long run on the idea of ‘windows’: an orderly progression of films from the first ‘window’ – cinema – to DVD and video, to pay TV, to TV. In the 1950s, when television first threatened the film business, exhibitors had tried to keep their window firmly closed. In Britain in 1958 they formed the Film Industry Defence Organisation (FIDO) to prevent films from being sold to TV at all. Later, UK exhibitors asked for a five-year hiatus between a film showing in cinemas and turning up on TV. Eventually, this was reduced to three years and in the early 1990s, at the beginning of the satellite subscriber TV era, to 12 months. The window was still there, though, and was considered sacrosanct. New films were released each week: the cinemas booked them, distributors hyped them and reviewers wrote about them. Through a combination of advertising and editorial, potential audiences were made aware of their existence. They could see the film in cinemas immediately or wait for their eventual appearance on other platforms.

This model of film releasing now seems quaint. Members of the millennial generation, born between 1980 and 2000, have become used to accessing music and filmed entertainment when and how they want. As Ted Sarandos, Netflix’s chief content officer, remarked in an interview with *Deadline* in May, “The theatrical window is the only window that really still exists. Every other form of entertainment is pretty much available to consumers where and when they want it.” Sarandos expressed bewilderment that the distribution of







# 2005

## TOP 10 FOREIGN-LANGUAGE FILMS AT THE UK/IRELAND BOX OFFICE

Film	Gross
Downfall (pictured below)	£1,867,793
A Very Long Engagement	£1,459,563
Kung Fu Hustle	£1,308,491
The Chorus	£1,072,309
Howl's Moving Castle	£820,695
Night Watch	£701,189
Maria Full of Grace	£671,570
Bombón el perro	£500,954
The Beat That My Heart Skipped	£430,564
The Consequences of Love	£427,238

# 2015

## TOP 10 FOREIGN-LANGUAGE FILMS AT THE UK/IRELAND BOX OFFICE

Film	Gross
Wild Tales	£728,057
Force Majeure	£602,674
Timbuktu	£311,029
The Salt of the Earth	£299,424
Gemma Boveri	£287,581
The New Girlfriend	£238,363
The Connection	£236,793
Girlhood	£232,511
Taxi Tehran	£193,037
A Pigeon Sat on a Branch...	£176,466

Charts exclude Bollywood films; some films include English-language scenes



films had been allowed to remain so fragmented. “There’s no physical supply chain,” he pointed out. “When we launch our movies and TV shows, we launch them everywhere at the same second. When we buy a movie at Sundance, it’s available to the whole world.” He was promising a world of immediacy and plenty that is becoming more familiar by the minute. It was reported that Netflix had a \$6 billion acquisition budget for 2016 alone. The company, which by the summer of 2016 offered its services in more than 190 countries, was going to Hoover up – and commission – vast quantities of TV dramas and films. Wherever you were in the world, apart from China, Syria, North Korea and Crimea, if you had a decent internet connection you could log in to Netflix and binge on series and movies.

There was a certain swagger to Netflix’s pronouncements about how big it was getting. Having started as a mail order company, renting out DVDs through the post, it is now at the forefront of a revolution in online distribution. Its rivals have responded by increasing their own acquisition budgets. The competition between them has been likened to an arms race. In Europe, at least, many industry insiders have taken alarm. At a Q&A with Sarandos in Cannes last year, André Lange, a French media analyst, told him that in ten or 15 years’ time Netflix would destroy the “eco-system of film production in Europe”. Unlike exhibitors, broadcasters and VOD operators in many European countries, Netflix isn’t currently obliged to invest in local film production. The arguments marshalled against the American internet giant are similar to those made about companies such as Google and Starbucks, perceived as not paying their fair share of taxes. At the end of Cannes this year, the European Commission responded to the threat posed to European production by the disruptors with a proposal for a 20 per cent quota for EU-produced content on their platforms.

Independent producers and distributors are still ambivalent about Netflix and its main rival, Amazon Studios. On the one hand, the online giants are welcomed as credible new customers who can compete on equal terms with companies such as Fox Searchlight or Sony Pictures Classics to acquire the best indie movies screening in Cannes, Berlin and Venice. Many don’t want to be alarmist about changes that may end up benefiting their industry – they remember the way the industry cried wolf at the beginning of the video era: in the early 1980s Jack Valenti, president of the Motion Picture Association of America, suggested famously that home video would destroy the film business. “VCR is to the American film producer and the American public as the Boston strangler is to the woman home alone,” he told Congress in 1982. A few years later, video was worth more to the Hollywood studios than theatrical box office.

On the other hand, there is extreme wariness about how the new disruptors are transforming the financing and distribution of independent movies. A typical independent movie pulls together its budget from soft money (tax credits, public funding), perhaps some broadcaster support and a number of pre-sales. Its sales agent announces the project at a market such as Cannes or Berlin. Distributors from various countries pre-buy it on the basis of cast and script; it then goes into production. Netflix and Amazon threaten this model. They often seek global rights, which means that traditional distributors



can't afford to compete. And they aren't just buying high-profile films from household name directors like Woody Allen or the most prestigious films in Sundance (such as Kenneth Lonergan's *Manchester by the Sea*). They are also gobbling up documentaries and packages of non-English-language films and festival favourites.

An added challenge is that the VOD market is so much stronger in the US than elsewhere. If a film has a straight-to-VOD release in the US, this threatens its chances of being shown in cinemas in the rest of the world. International distributors currently have deals with pay TV channels in which a film's value is based on how it performs at the US box office: if that film hasn't had a US theatrical release, it is worth peanuts. The film business in general – and exhibitors in particular – has responded much more warmly to Amazon Studios than to Netflix. Amazon doesn't mind the films it acquires or produces being shown in cinemas first. It helps that Amazon's head of marketing and distribution, Bob Berney, is a well-known and popular figure in US independent cinema who, earlier in his career, was behind the US releases of such films as Christopher Nolan's *Memento* (2000) and Alfonso Cuarón's *Y tu mamá también* (2001).

Not that filmmakers are shunning Netflix. At the Venice Film Festival last year, Cary Fukunaga, director of *Beasts of No Nation* (one of the most high-profile Netflix acquisitions last year), was philosophical about the fact that his movie would be given only a token theatrical release (to qualify for awards). "It is very hard to get a film exhibited these days. It is very hard to find space in a theatre long enough that people will not only go out to see your film but will even know that it is there in the first place," he said, predicting that his film had a better chance of being seen by a sizeable audience on Netflix than it would have done through a conventional theatrical release.

In the wake of these arguments, it is becoming clear that changing distribution models are a far more complex matter than first appeared. This isn't just a question about the theatrical window being eroded or the fact that certain films are going to be seen on VOD first, it is about the very nature of cinema-going, an experience that was changing in ways that affected every type of film, from blockbusters to foreign-language titles.

## DEFENCE OF THE REALM

The mainstream exhibitors' default position is defensive. In the US, they have reacted with extreme hostility toward Napster founder Sean Parker's much publicised Screening Room concept. Parker's idea, floated earlier this year, was that movies should be made available to watch at home on the day of their release but that consumers would need to pay a premium (\$50 for access to a given movie for 48 hours as well as a further \$150 for the pirate-proof set-top box.) For all the controversy it provoked, Parker's idea isn't especially groundbreaking. There have been several earlier initiatives along similar lines. In the UK, leading independent distributor exhibitor Curzon has been releasing films on the same day in theatres and on its home cinema platform for several years. For Curzon, the online release should be considered as part of the theatrical window. Consumers are still paying a premium price (£10) to watch new movies on a one-off basis at home. They aren't getting these movies cut-price as part of a Netflix-style subscription package.

# \$6bn

The reported value of Netflix's 2016 acquisition budget

# £1.7m

The gross box office of the live 4K broadcast of the UK's National Theatre production of 'Hamlet' starring Benedict Cumberbatch

# \$2bn

Box-office revenues of last year's 'Star Wars: The Force Awakens'

# £97

The total UK opening weekend box-office takings of 'Misconduct', starring Al Pacino and Anthony Hopkins

*The most blatantly negative attribute of the conversion to digital is that it has reduced rather than increased choice in British cinemas*

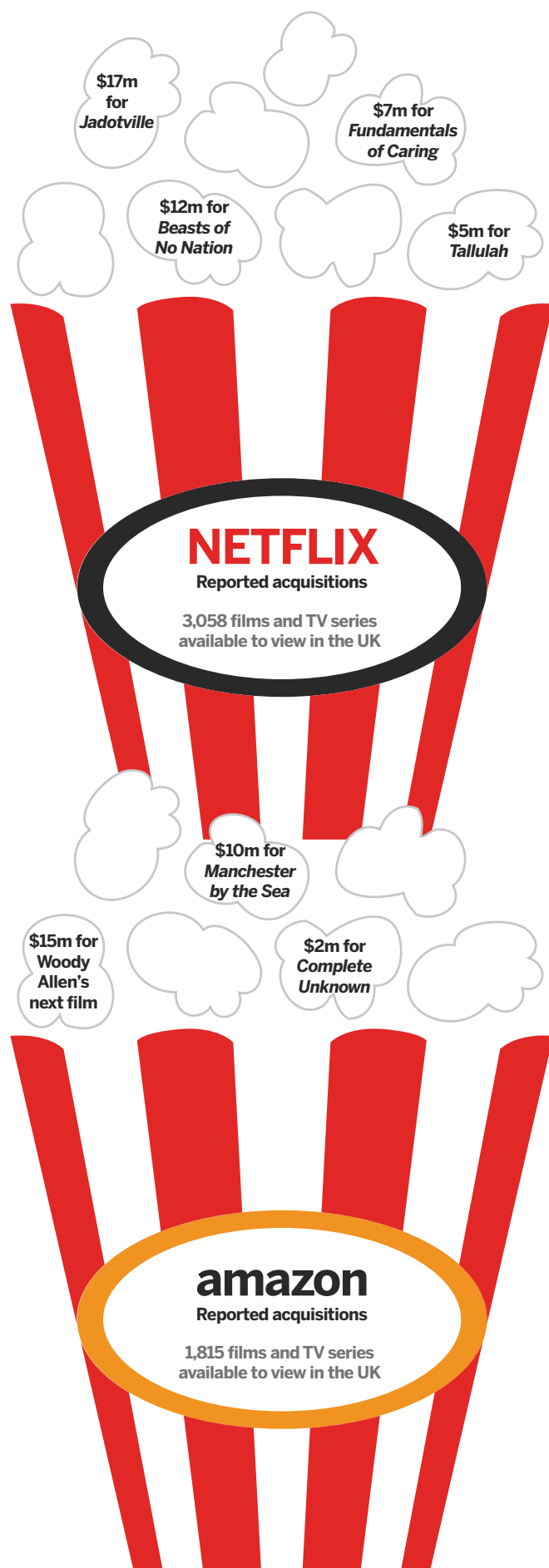
One obvious irony is that the mainstream exhibitors and distributors which seem most threatened by initiatives such as Screening Room or Curzon's Premium VOD platform are themselves changing their models. Cinemas are no longer places just to see movies. "Cinemas will change from just being cinemas to being real entertainment hubs where you can go and have a myriad cultural experiences on screen," Sony's digital cinema premium content executive John Bullen said earlier this summer. "Cinema' will be an antiquated term in a few years' time." The cinema would be defined as a communal space where audiences could enjoy all sorts of digital content. His remarks came in the context of a discussion about 'event cinema' and the success that Sony and its partners the National Theatre and cinema chain Vue had enjoyed with the live 4K broadcast of the NT production of *Hamlet* starring Benedict Cumberbatch in October 2015. *Hamlet* grossed £1.7 million from its initial live screening and another £200,000 when a recorded version was shown later. Sony had first begun experimenting with showing non-theatrical content on cinema screens in 2011 with the presentation of an Avril Lavigne video. It went on to experiment with sport – showing the Wimbledon tennis final worldwide – and with gaming.

Film itself has also become part of the event cinema experience. Secret Cinema founder Fabien Riggall came up with the idea of giving movies an interactive, immersive dimension that helped to build drama and suspense around them. Founded in 2007, Secret Cinema charges hefty ticket prices (up to £129 for *Dirty Dancing* in 2016) for audiences to attend screenings in old factories or warehouses that have been transformed to reflect the world the film is portraying. Audiences often come in costume and only learn where the event is being held once their tickets are secured. In 2015, Secret Cinema grossed £6.5 million with its rerelease of *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980). Handling rereleases used to be the job of repertory cinemas. In an era when old classics are easily and inexpensively available on VOD platforms or DVD, the idea that a 35-year-old film screening in a single venue could be a top ten box-office hit was extraordinary. Nonetheless, this was a one-off. 'Event cinema' in its usual meaning has seen classical concerts, operas, Kenneth Branagh stage productions, Take That concerts and popular TV shows (for example, special episodes of *Doctor Who*) shown on the big screen, but its influence tends to be overstated. In 2015, event cinema represented only around two per cent of total box office. The sector is still growing, but not at the speed some analysts had been predicting.

The most blatantly negative attribute of the conversion to digital is that it has reduced rather than increased choice in British cinemas. How did this paradox come about? It is instructive – and dispiriting – to read the statements made by the UK Film Council at the time of the launch of its pioneering initiative, the Digital Screen Network, in 2005: "Under the Digital Screen Network plan which will see an investment of up to £13 million, the UK Film Council will equip around 200 screens in around 150 cinemas across the UK (approximately one in four of the total) with state-of-the-art digital projection equipment," read an early press release. "In return, cinemas will be asked to commit to using the new technology to show a broader range of films on a regular basis, giving many more people the chance to see







specialised (non-blockbuster) films such as British multiple award winner *Touching the Void*, recent New Zealand classic *Whale Rider* and the internationally acclaimed comedy *Goodbye Lenin!* The BBC reported that the “key benefit of the digital network will be an increase in the distribution and screening of British films, documentaries and foreign language films”. A decade on, with the Digital Screen Network long since defunct and UK cinemas fully digitised, choice is shrinking, not expanding. The bold new world promised by the DSN simply hasn’t materialised as independent cinemas have become ever more mainstream in their programming.

In particular, foreign-language distribution in the UK is in the doldrums. Last year only three foreign-language films grossed more than £300,000 at the UK box office (see ‘The Numbers’, *S&S*, February). The most successful, *Wild Tales*, took £728,000. The stuttering performance of foreign-language films is in stark contrast to 15 years ago, when *Amélie* (2001) raked in more than \$6 million at the UK box office while *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (2001) had a box office of close to \$13 million. These were accepted by British audiences as mainstream films, and their language hardly seemed to be an issue. As Jean-Paul Salomé, the president of French cinema promoter UniFrance, said in an interview late last year, it is becoming “more and more difficult” to get British audiences to watch French films. French films (especially a recent run of blockbuster comedies) are still popular in Germany and Italy but the UK is turning into a no-go area. If French cinema is struggling for a foothold in the British market, it’s inevitable that non-English-language films from other countries are finding it even harder to reach UK audiences. The talk is of a full-blown slump in foreign-language cinema in the UK.

One perception about foreign-language films is that they’re easier to see in London than in the regions, but according to veteran arthouse distributor Robert Beeson of New Wave Films, this isn’t necessarily true. “There’s not much seat space for foreign-language movies in London now the old Renoir has been converted. Before, you had two 250-seat cinemas to play these films in. Now, you’ve got five 28-seat cinemas. There’s no way you can rack up any kind of box office on screens that are ten per cent of the size they used to be... you have the bizarre situation that on most foreign-language films, you’ve probably got more seats available in Bristol or Manchester than in London.” What were once considered specialist arthouse venues with strict programming policies are now likely to show Coen brothers films and probably Bond movies as well, thereby pushing out foreign-language fare. As Beeson puts it, “They play exactly the same movies as the Odeon around the corner but with decent coffee.”

No one can quite pinpoint the precise reasons behind the woeful current UK box-office performance by foreign-language films. Is it simply a lack of *Amélie*-style blockbusters and of the steady stream of auteur-driven foreign-language masterpieces that used to be in such abundant supply in the Truffaut and Fellini era? Is it to do with access to screens? Are TV companies like the BBC and Channel 4 to blame for no longer acquiring foreign-language films? In today’s digital era, the famous line from Wim Wenders’s *Kings of the Road*, “The Americans have colonised our subconscious,” has an added resonance for the British industry. As double Palme d’Or

FORCORN/ICON BY MEMENTO SALAS FROM THE NOUN PROJECT



winner Ken Loach notes, “Our cinemas are dominated by American films... it’s no use saying that if films are good enough, they will get on because you’ve got to develop the taste [for them]. Most people in the UK see films with an American voice. The papers will talk far more about the Oscars than about Cannes.”

However, the idea that there was once a golden age of foreign-language distribution may in any case be fanciful. According to Ben Luxford, the BFI’s head of UK audiences, “Foreign language has only ever been at best knocking on two per cent of the market for the year.” Luxford also suggests that such movies are suffering because the old distribution models are fracturing. “The opportunity to take risks in the first, theatrical window is less and less because of the lack of a meaningful back-end [profit] on these films,” he says. Broadcasters aren’t buying foreign-language fare, the DVD market is in decline and VOD doesn’t make up the shortfall. The BFI’s Distribution Fund offers support to distributors committed to ambitious theatrical releases on their films. However, distributors today often won’t take the chance to go out on a large number of screens, even if that means forfeiting BFI support. “The widest distributors like to go is maybe 40 screens. Even that is a risk, maybe a few too many. The days of spending £250,000 on a foreign-language film to be matched by the BFI with £250,000 in order to sell it to Channel 4 for half a million pounds and then sell it to Sky and then sell 100,000 DVDs – that doesn’t happen any more,” Luxford says. “You can’t spend that million in the first window because you’re not going to recoup your funds.” Even so, there is clearly a commitment among public funders to ensure foreign-language films maintain at least a presence in British cinemas. The BFI Film Audience Network (FAN) recently announced that it is investing £100,000 to support the distribution of six specialist and foreign-language films this year.

## MORE IS LESS

Another of the paradoxes about distribution in the digital era is that there is no choice because there is too much choice. With the ever-growing glut of titles being released, it is increasingly a case of blink and you’ll miss them. As Luxford puts it, “No matter how good you are and how well you perform, there is always something else coming out next week that is going to take the screens.” Even when independent distributors secure a week’s booking for a film, that rarely means that their film will be shown at every available time. Instead, they will get two or three shows a day, often at the less popular times. There were 853 releases in 2015 but the top ten releases accounted for 38.8 per cent of the box office. The top 100 films (12 per cent of the releases) accounted for almost 90 per cent of ticket sales. In other words, this was a hugely lopsided, polarised market in which a handful of blockbusters were utterly dominant. More than 700 films were fighting over 10 per cent of the market.

One trend is on the increase. Smaller distributors or those that have access to their own cinemas are ignoring the 17-week holdback demanded by the big exhibitors and are releasing simultaneously in cinemas and online. No one quite knows how robustly films are performing on VOD because neither Netflix nor smaller platforms such as Curzon Home Cinema release their results. An electronic sell-through top 20 chart is expected to

# £6.5m

Secret Cinema’s gross from its 2015 rerelease of *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980)

# 3

The number of foreign-language films that grossed more than £300,000 at the UK box office last year

# \$6m

The UK box-office takings for *Amélie* (2001)

# 17 weeks


The window of exclusivity demanded by big exhibitors in order to show a film at the cinema

*You have the bizarre situation that on most foreign-language films, you’ve probably got more seats available in Bristol or Manchester than in London*

be established in the UK by the end of the year. If that happens, the industry will at last get a clearer sense of whether VOD is generating anything like the revenue that DVD and VHS once did. There are also strong hints that the mainstream exhibitors will begin to show more flexibility regarding windows. As Lord Puttnam pointed out in a keynote speech for Film Distributors’ Association in April 2016, these exhibitors are guilty of a double standard. “Firstly, cinema operators are now perfectly happy to play modern-day BBC specials such as *Doctor Who* or *Sherlock*, simultaneously with their TV transmission with no window at all. And yet, at the same time, they flatly refuse to show a mainstream movie if it comes with any less exclusivity than 17 weeks, even when they only play it for four or five weeks – if that. *The Force Awakens*, the highest grossing film of all time, had pretty much played out after a nine- or ten-week run. So even with that movie, most UK consumers had to wait almost two further months during which the film was simply unavailable for legitimate purchase.”

Puttnam’s remarks are even more relevant when applied to films that haven’t performed to their box-office potential. Their distributors will have spent a small fortune marketing them but when they fail, there is no chance to claw back some of their outlay by rushing them on to VOD or DVD; they have to wait the full 17 weeks – and then mount a second expensive marketing campaign to remind audiences of the films’ existences. Distributors have long expressed their frustration that if their films aren’t released at least 17 weeks before Christmas, the films won’t be available on DVD in time for the consumer festivities, when DVD sales always spike. The same applies if you have a romcom that you release less than four months before Valentine’s Day or a horror film that is in cinemas too close to Halloween.

Industry prognosticators don’t seem at all certain how the industry will evolve over the next five years. Perhaps Netflix will acquire a Hollywood studio, or be swallowed up by one itself. Whatever the case, film lovers will hope that the remarks made by Danish director Nicolas Winding Refn at exhibitors’ conference CinemaCon in the US earlier this year prove true. Refn was there as a guest of Amazon Studios, which had backed his latest film *The Neon Demon*. As he told the theatre owners, “There will always be cinema. All you people should really remember you are not just showing great films, you are showing an experience that we will remember for the rest of our lives. That is the power of being together and experiencing great films together.”

It was rousing rhetoric. Recent global box-office results suggest that the cinema is on the upswing. Tentpole movies from the likes of the *Star Wars*, Marvel and Bond franchises, shown on huge IMAX screens with state-of-the-art sound systems, have driven up revenues everywhere. If theatrical is the engine driving ancillary sales, it hasn’t spluttered to a halt quite yet. The Chinese market is expanding at a ferocious rate and Netflix and Amazon’s new releasing strategies have galvanised as well as disrupted the industry. These are reasons for optimism, but the bleaker side of this transforming world is that independent US and British as well as foreign-language films are being squeezed out of the UK’s cinemas. They may all be available on a VOD platform but you’re likely to have to scroll a very long way down to find them. 



# KEEP IT IN THE COMMUNITY

*Up and down the UK, and across the world, a thriving network of community cinemas exists alongside their commercial counterparts, bringing films to eager local audiences*

**By Amanda Randall**

Earlier this year Mark Cosgrove, cinema curator at the Bristol Watershed, wrote in the *Guardian*, "More must be done on the ground to engage the appetite of audiences for seeing foreign-language films in the cinema – and trust me, there is an appetite." Many of us in the community cinema network agree. Bubbling under the surface of the commercial cinema sector, and largely ignored by researchers and national programmers, are community cinemas – an overwhelmingly volunteer-led movement motivated by the desire to bring a more diverse range of films to local audiences. The remarkable success of these grassroots ventures offers an insight into audience tastes that challenges assumptions about how willing people are to embrace films that they are unlikely to come across otherwise.

The notion of a cinema 'club' dates back to 1925 with the launch of the Film Society in London, which screened neglected or little known films to fellow cinéastes. In the 1930s, provincial film societies followed in Manchester, Oxford and Southampton. In 1945 this growing group formed the British Federation of Film Societies (BFSS). The British Film Institute soon after set up a booking agency to complement the Federation and this became the Cinema For All Booking Scheme, which societies still use today. The cost of 16mm technology dropped after the war and became more portable, allowing the staging of small-scale local cinema events. More recently the network has grown enormously, with film societies enmeshed within the community in many localities – sharing an identity, an interest or a location. And it's not just a British institution; just try searching for 'community cinema' on Facebook or Google. You might be surprised at the global nature of these local treasures.

## THE RULES OF ATTRACTION

When cinemas were closing in the 1970s and 80s and multiplexes set up out of town, audiences turned to the more convenient video at home. But this couldn't replace the shared experience of watching a film with other people. The early days of Channel 4 reminded us that wonderful films were being



made all over the world, even though we couldn't see them in the cinema. This audience didn't disappear – it went local.

One attraction of a regular, local cinema space is undoubtedly the social aspect. People who have felt excluded from a night at the cinema because of lack of transport or low income, or who feel unwelcome at venues catering for younger audiences, can often now walk or cycle to the 'cinema', meet new people, support a venture they come to see as their own, and have an enjoyable time – all for about half the cost of a visit to the multiplex.

Audiences at community cinemas come to trust the programmers, and programmers in turn learn not to underestimate the audience. It's not uncommon for organisers to be stopped in the street and given feedback on the latest screening, with customers expressing how deeply moved they have been by certain films (Ken Loach's history of the welfare state *The Spirit of '45* springs to mind).

## NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH

The majority of published studies on community cinema audiences examine the historical situation rather than the contemporary experience, and commercial

cinemas rather than those run by volunteers. With so little research into their impact, it's difficult to be certain of numbers. Becky Innes, a PhD researcher into rural community cinema at the University of East Anglia, and exhibition consultant Jim Barrett recently researched the sector for the BFI and identified five principal types of community exhibitor: volunteer-run community cinemas or film societies (accounting for 49 per cent of the sector), mobile and rural cinema network venues (27 per cent), mixed-use venues (15 per cent) and others (eg higher education film clubs, nine per cent).

Cinema For All estimates that there are 1,071 community cinemas, film clubs or societies in the UK, of which 700 are members of the scheme. Its annual survey for 2014-15 concluded that 33 per cent of groups operate in rural areas (compared with three per cent of commercial screens). Around one quarter of films screened are British and another quarter are foreign-language titles.

Responding exhibitors recorded 127,413 admissions to 2,558 screenings in 2014-15. Theatrical ticket sales on this scale would have generated box-office revenue of almost £900,000, according to Cinema For All.





The best served areas are the south-east and south-west of England, and Scotland, with the Midlands and north-east England the least well served. Jaq Chell from Cinema For All adds, "Northern Ireland used to be sparse, but has grown quickly over the last five years." The top titles hired in 2015 from the Cinema For All Booking Scheme were: Asif Kapadia's *Amy*, Ira Sachs's *Love Is Strange* and John Madden's *Second Best Exotic Marigold Hotel*. The top five films hired from any source were Ritesh Batra's *The Lunchbox*, Wes Anderson's *The Grand Budapest Hotel*, Matthew Warchus's *Pride*, Pawel Pawlikowski's *Ida* and Alexander Payne's *Nebraska*.

Starting up is easier today thanks to falling costs, the greater availability of films and the increasing ease of projection. No longer limited to 16mm film and all its associated equipment and expertise, most societies now screen from Blu-ray, fewer from DCP. Licensing

*It's hard work, and a constant battle to promote events, but it is worth the intense sense of satisfaction that results*

is less complex and there is support available from Cinema For All, the Film Audience Network, Independent Cinema Office and the BFI's Neighbourhood Cinema Fund. The Big Lottery Fund also provides grants for projection equipment, seating and screens.

### WORK, REST AND PLAY

The commitment of film society organisers can't be underestimated. The majority of societies are run on a volunteer basis, generally by a small committee supplemented by other volunteers who help with set-up, poster-bombing the area, running the bar or selling tickets. A few, like Saffron Screen in Essex (established in 2006), have a small paid staff, but this is rare. Films seen at festivals often appear on the programme, including those without a UK cinema release. Frequency varies from ten shows a year to several a week. Richard Hall of the Lincoln Film Society (established 1953) explains, "[Technical] improvements have resulted in increased membership, a rise in audience numbers and an almost doubling of the film shows from 14 in 1987 to 26 today. We've just completed our 63rd season, which has attracted an average of 149 people to each film."

Like the original Film Society, some groups introduce films and hold discussions afterwards. Patience is key; it takes time for people unused to voicing their opinions in public to speak up, but this is one of the social benefits that emerges once the right atmosphere has been created. More than half of respondents to Cinema For All's survey offer some kind of informal film education – workshops, day schools or evening classes, which are affordable and unthreatening to the non-academic.

The connections between a place and its community organisations can be profound, developing rich experiences for 'staff' and customers alike. Staff enjoy staging successful events, developing working partnerships and providing a safe, fun and affordable night out for people who might otherwise have few opportunities for socialising locally, older women for example. Brad Scott of Forest Row Film Society (established 1978) says, "It's hard work, and a constant battle to promote events and keep in the public eye, but it is worth the intense sense of satisfaction that results from showing something unexpected and developing our audience's taste for it."


The community-run cinema becomes a social and civic hub every bit as much as it is a place of entertainment. One of the newer community exhibitors is Newcastle Community Cinema in Northern Ireland (established 2015). Its chairman Rob Manley says, "Almost 2,000 people visited our new theatre in the first two months and the

feedback was amazingly positive. More volunteers came on board, allowing the team to launch a regular programme designed to build audiences. The project has been widely acknowledged by all stakeholders as being a catalyst for regeneration, community safety and empowerment."

Film societies forge strong links with local businesses, festivals, schools and other organisations such as the University of the Third Age, youth theatre and LGBTQ groups, staging events and screenings relevant to specific interests. Films screened on this local level can be a productive way of promoting diversity in both audience and programming. Lincoln Film Society's Richard Hall says, "Our audience reflects the changing nature of Lincoln's population. The demographic covers every age group: we attract people of all ages and from all nations."

### RIISING TO THE CHALLENGE

Community cinema organisers face similar challenges wherever they are. Few community 'cinemas' operate in venues designed to show films – instead they are usually held in public halls that have to be equipped for screenings using meagre resources. While a fortunate few revel in the luxury of plush seating, many have to use typical town hall chairs; the canny film fan brings his or her own cushion. Lost in Film (established 2008) in Cornwall reports that its major challenges are attracting people under 50, screening sci-fi and showing films that are more than two years old or in languages other than English or French. By contrast Mike O'Brien from Screen St Ives (established 2011) says, "Some of our most popular films are non-English language – *Hugo* and *Josephine* [1967] and *Caesar Must Die* [2012], for example. The audience age-range is definitely going down, with younger couples and the occasional student coming along. Earlier this year, a group of young women on a girls' night out arrived – that felt like quite a breakthrough." Struggles to improve a membership or attendance plateau are common. Sourcing licences, especially for films without UK distributors, is a constant challenge, according to Rachel Cross of Chester Film Society (established 1970).

While there's little comparison between the financial imperative of the commercial sector and the break-even ethos of community cinemas, it seems like a missed opportunity for the industry to ignore the numbers, sheer enthusiasm and open-mindedness of local organisers and audiences. Community cinemas prove that in the most unexpected places there is a thirst for diverse films that challenge, excite and entertain. It may be an unconventional form of film exhibition but there are a lot of us doing it. 



# THE GREAT LEVELLING

*Once, we talked about 'movies' and 'cinema' and 'the big screen' as if they were all the same thing. But new kinds of screen, showing mutated versions of film, demand a new language*

**By Nick Pinkerton**

If you go to a movie in the United States at a theatre belonging to the Cinemark chain, you will witness a pre-show etiquette lesson meant to dissuade patrons from fidgeting with their smartphones during the feature presentation. The spot, which is just awkward and awful enough to be worth quoting, encourages viewers to say, "No way, pocket screen" to their phones, and instead to open themselves up to enthrallment by a "movie that's about to start on this movie-sized screen that was made for movies". Other exhibitors have instead decided to roll (over) with the times – this spring, the AMC chain announced that it was considering designating specific auditoriums "texting friendly". Whether pro- or anti-pocket screen, the message sent by these developments is the same: the mighty has fallen, and the cinema screen has lost its place of pride atop the hierarchy of screens.

Movies seem at one and the same time more ubiquitous and less commanding than ever. On a recent train commute I sat next to some guy watching a download of the recent Tina Fey comedy *Whiskey Tango Foxtrot* on a five-inch phone, his enjoyment seemingly not diminished by the added duty of dashing off a text message every few seconds in a pop-up window that appeared right on screen. And who am I to judge? I still remember one night in 2011 when, eating dinner at a restaurant alone in a strange city, I watched a chunk of Erich von Stroheim's 1919 film *Blind Husbands* on my fancy new phone, and had the shivery sense of stepping over a precipice into a new world whence I could never return. I may even have had a vision of the much-circulated video of David Lynch castigating iPhone 'moviegoing' from a few years back: "It's such a sadness that you think you've seen a film on your fucking telephone..."

We all basically know what we're referring to when we talk about a movie – in the commercial context, it's something about an hour or longer that you can maybe see in a room with a bunch of other people or, more likely today, watch on television, laptop, pay cable, home video, iPhone, etc. But what makes a movie a movie? Is the definitive version what's experienced on

Cinemark's "movie-sized screen", a screen untainted by the touch of lower orders of art and entertainment (such as serial cable drama, cut scenes, gifs and internet pornography)? Even in the case of the ideal and idealised theatrical presentation, it's hard to say that a vast, unbreachable gulf still exists between the multiplex and the 'home theatre' experience. The presence of analogue film in the projection booth, the one technical characteristic that continued to set the cinematic pilgrimage apart after the appearance of TV and home video, has all but disappeared in the wake of 2009's *Avatar*, with which James Cameron saved the Na'vi and condemned first-run 35mm to the dustbin of history. The projectors were practically dismantled overnight, and even the celluloid-partisan repertory houses, the last hold-outs of original format projection, are now at the mercy of archives and distributors who won't lend out their vast print holdings or allow the option of 35mm when they can foist off one of their 'stunning' dead-tech 4K DCP restorations instead. In the US, a country where dedication to freedom of consumer choice is taken to the brink of self-destruction, all this took place behind closed doors, without a quorum or a vote. Given how rarely discussed the qualities of sound and image are in most non-niche writing about movies, the language scarcely existed for a public debate over the possible implications of the changeover, though I suspect that the average consumer has felt it in ways they aren't wholly able to articulate.

As inducements to theatrical moviegoing, we now have only the purportedly mystical experience of collectively dreaming in the dark with a bunch of dolts who can't stop futzing with their phones and the draw of opening-day access to new movies. And even the lure of exclusive early access has been gradually chipped away at, with so-called day-and-date releasing – the simultaneous appearance of a movie in theatrical, video-on-demand, and home video formats – increasing in popularity among distributors specialising in independent films, and with the emergence of streaming content providers such as Amazon Studios and Netflix as players on the festival circuit. Now even the big studios seem to be considering the possible advantages of the simultaneous release model: this spring Sean Parker, of Napster and Facebook fame, was pitching distributors on a company called the Screening Room, which proposes to market a piracy-proof set-top box that would allow access to big new releases for \$50 a pop. Thus far exhibitors have staunchly resisted the idea, though history has proven it is mighty tough to stuff these sorts of genres back into the bottle once they're out.

For most people, movies are experienced now as digital files of variable resolution viewed on an assortment of glowing rectangles of descending size, from the movie-sized screen to the living room flatscreen to the tablet to the phone – and on most of these multipurpose devices the 'movie' is just one of a bevy of entertainment options. While a revolution in viewing habits has taken place, film cultural discourse has lagged behind, mired in nostalgia for the days before the barriers fell. Among other things, this means that contemporary cinema is retrofitted to be understood according to a familiar narrative of cultural-critical history, so that there is an unbroken continuity between the *Cahiers du cinéma* moment of the mid-1950s and 2016, and there is always a new crop of geniuses hiding in plain sight, working craftily within the constraints of the Hollywood system, disrespected by the hoity-toity cultural gatekeepers, and Justin Lin is the new Anthony Mann, and it's eternal summer in Paris as we emerge blinking from the rue d'Ulm Cinémathèque of our minds to relive and relive the Golden Age of Cinephilia.

A few more observant critics have, one way or another, recognised that such a radical change in the environment in which films are produced and consumed calls for a new vocabulary with which to discuss what the movies are, or are becoming. Kent Jones, in a recent piece for *Film Comment*, asked readers

ILLUSTRATION BY NATE KITCH





to question certain reflexes inculcated by auteur theory, which he argues have persisted in discourse well after the conditions that created them have disappeared. “We’ve grown used to equating the excitement of cinema with its impurities, with the model of art secretly made under the cover of crass commercialism, with the critic panning for gold among piles of dross,” Jones writes. But “what we refer to as cinema – for lack of a better description, the nuanced articulation of image and sound – is no longer a great popular art form. The cinema has now diverged from the greater entity of worldwide audiovisual entertainment, where artistry is far more suspect and less welcome than it was in the heyday of Harry Cohn and Louis B. Mayer.” This is part of an ongoing effort by Jones to push film critical conversation beyond terms arrived at around the middle of the 20th century, even if it involves throwing out the proverbial baby with the bathwater – see his statement, in 2015: “*Mise en scène* is a beautiful concept, but I think it has outlived its usefulness.” The critic Adrian Martin takes another tack in his 2014 book *Mise en Scène and Film Style: From Classical Hollywood to New Media Art*, in which he outlines the various historical definitions of *mise en scène*, then brings the concept to bear on various ‘extra-cinematic’ works: international reality TV, a gallery installation by Chantal Akerman, a set piece from an episode of

*Who can say we aren’t living in interesting times? The idol of cinema has been toppled, and its fragments are everywhere*

*Breaking Bad* (2008-13), Lisa Kudrow’s internet series *Web Therapy* (2008-15).

When Jones imagines cinema today as “a specialised practice, far more likely to turn up within a museum or on a streaming service” and Martin locates *mise en scène* in an episode of *Ladette to Lady* (2005-10), both are recognising the need for a definition of movies that goes beyond the movie-sized screen. What has occurred in recent years, and what these writers are responding to, is a kind of great levelling. Alterations in viewing habits have humbled the movie, which, after decades of enjoying an elevated or exempt status, is now jostling shoulder to shoulder with other audiovisual forms: television, video games, net.art, gallery projections, music videos and so on.

This is the final arrival of a phenomenon that began a long time ago, but never quite reached the critical mass which made it imperative that we talk about it. Most auteurs of baby boomer vintage or younger discovered cinema through old movies on television, and from quite early on there was the troubling hybrid animal that is the

TV movie to deal with: taking American examples alone, can we honestly say that Sam Peckinpah’s *Noon Wine* (1966), Curtis Harrington’s *How Awful About Allan* (1970) or George Cukor’s *Love Among the Ruins* (1975) exist on a fundamentally different plane from their ‘proper’ film work?

A few months ago when I was recording a podcast with the critic Amy Taubin, about the best ‘movies’ of the previous year, she lamented the fact that most film publications limit viable entrants to theatrical releases, suggesting that the category ought to be expanded to ‘lens-based’ work. (Specifically, Taubin was miffed about being unable to sing her love of Cinemax’s *The Knick* [2014-], directed by Steven Soderbergh.) J. Hoberman was ahead of the curve here: in 1986, as staff critic for the *Village Voice*, he included ‘Game 6, 1986 World Series’ on his year-end top ten list, right between Yamakawa Naoto’s *A Girl, She Is 100%* and the Oliver Stone twofer of *Platoon* and *Salvador*. Among youngsters on social media feeds there has been fuss over the failure by movie-centric social networking site Letterboxd to accommodate discussion of music videos, particularly in light of such high-profile recent releases as Rihanna/Megaforce’s ‘Bitch Better Have My Money’ and Beyoncé/Dikayl Rimmasch/Jonas Akerlund/Khalik Allah’s ‘Lemonade’.

This is in part tied to a motion to expand the conversation about ‘cinema’ beyond the confines of the feature-filmmaking apparatus, access to which is still tied to privilege; and, in the instances cited above, to credit black female auteurs. For my part, I favour anything that helps free the conversation, so-called, from the tyranny of the new release slate, which often boils down to discussion of the relative merits of the Marvel and DC cinematic universes, an endeavour that strikes me as maybe the worst use of an adult’s time and my mind imaginable – well, outside of talking seriously about plot twists in *Game of Thrones*. The necessity of reconsidering how we think and talk about an expanded cinema has often given way to excesses, to overemphatic ‘So-and-so-is-the-new-movies’ ballyhoo that bears only a coincidental resemblance to criticism. Much touted work belonging to extra-cinematic audiovisual categories seems valuable principally for the service it renders as think-piece fodder, and it’s an awfully curious coincidence that the sudden astronomic spike in must-watch TV happened to overlap almost exactly with the moment of Web 2.0, with its insatiable hunger for constantly refreshing content. But who can say we aren’t living in interesting times? The idol of cinema has been toppled, and now its fragments are everywhere. And isn’t it terrible? Isn’t it exciting? ☹





# UP ON THE BARRICADES

*Commercial forces and new technology threaten to squeeze out independent and arthouse cinema. But it doesn't have to be that way – film lovers are finding ways to fight back*

**By Kate Taylor**

*Sight & Sound's* poll for the best films of 2015 (*S&S*, January) revealed something of a schism between contributors concerning the state of UK film culture. To some it is the worst of times. "It feels a little like end of days for independent cinema," stated Jason Wood, artistic director of Manchester's new HOME cinema, "both in terms of media coverage and available cinema screen space." And Nick James, the editor of *Sight & Sound*, issued a stark message: "For the coming year all cinephiles will need to become more serious and trenchant as keepers of the flame as the conditions for the nurturing of cinema history and legacy become ever more difficult."

The year ended with ice-water statistics on the dwindling audiences for international cinema: films from outside the UK and USA made up 44 per cent of releases in 2015 but accounted for just over four per cent of earnings. No foreign-language film passed the £1 million mark at the box office, and French films, often seen as a safe bet on the arthouse circuit, did not deliver a hit.

Yet elsewhere there was optimism. Corinna Antrobus of London's Bechdel Test Fest wrote: "In October, I screened both *Magic Mike* and *Magic Mike XXL* to 300 giddy feminists as part of the Bechdel Test Fest. Nothing could have prepared me for such an electrifying reception and ultimate gratitude from the audience. If this isn't what cinema is supposed to do, then I've got it all wrong." Several new independent cinemas have also recently opened, including three in London: the Regent Street Cinema, the volunteer-run Deptford Cinema and the cinephile hub Close-Up, which brought its 19,000-plus DVD library to a nifty new micro-cinema and café-bar site in East London.

So yes and yes. It is a perilous time in distribution and exhibition. Cinema audiences, especially arthouse ones, are getting older, and without a younger generation with a cinema-going habit to replenish them we will still be talking about "the wonder of the big screen" and "the value of the collective experience" as they lock the doors of the last indie cinema. But we have the technological tools to exchange



ideas, and the will to channel our love of film into the bricks-and-mortar business of keeping cinemas going. Putting the former in service of the latter is cinephile activism.

'Cinephilia' is a word with many connotations and much history, but we'll define it here as a love for film: an involved passion where you don't just watch films, but write about, programme, make, discuss or study them. The activism part comes in when we decide on the kind of film culture that we want, and then fight for it. In a 2011 online essay, the Sydney-based programmer Mathieu Ravier wrote that the threat to diversity on our screens "offers a tremendous opportunity to define new cinephilia as a form of activism or resistance".

So what does this look like? The past five years have given us a proliferation of points of inspiration. There are way too many to list, but here are a few starters.

The writer and activist Sophie Mayer, in the *S&S* poll, praised "the return of film collectives, packing houses and making trouble: the Bechdel Test Fest, Club des Femmes, the Reel Good Film Club, Raising Films, New Black Film Collective, Film Fatales; curators, filmmakers and activists regenerating the community of UK cinema towards (and from) the energy and excitement that emerge from equity and inclusion".

*There is a risk we will still be talking about 'the wonder of the big screen' as they lock the doors of the last indie cinema*

Cinephile activism lives in passion-fuelled, often volunteer-run cinemas such as Bristol's CUBE, Newcastle's Star and Shadow, Liverpool's Small Cinema, and New York's professedly profit-orientated Metrograph, which caused a collective swoon when it first announced its programme.

The impact of Scalarama – September's annual season of DIY screenings across the UK, with its 'fill the land with cinemas' philosophy – must not be underestimated, galvanising independent programmers who are filling in gaps, screening the unseen and building loyal audiences. Meanwhile the first Overnight Film Festival reinvigorated the festival experience through fresh, inclusive programming, and a hardy dedication to 35mm.

By making academic writing and video essay criticism accessible, Catherine Grant of Film Studies for Free opens up a flow of analytical ideas, while the texture of critical writing (and range of voices) is greatly expanded by myriad online journals and print fanzines, including *Fireflies*, *Lola*, *Cleo*, *Girls Gotta Eat*, *Reverse Shot*, *Photogénie* and *Lumen*.

What all these ventures have in common is a political bent that informs and is informed by their cinematic activities. A more inclusive film culture isn't about eradicating the primacy of list-making or auteur-centricity (though we could try, right?), and it certainly isn't about the threat of video on demand. Something much more expansive is going on, and there is room for it all. But if we are to live in a world where feminist screenings of *Magic Mike XXL* and a place like Close-Up can both thrive, our passion for cinema needs to be not just celebrated, but politicised. **©**



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# D.A. PENNEBAKER AND CHRIS HEGEDUS

The early, groundbreaking films of D.A. Pennebaker, including his mid-60s Bob Dylan portrait *Dont Look Back*, are undisputed masterworks of American *cinéma vérité*, but following a creative slump in the mid-70s his career needed fresh inspiration. He found it with filmmaker Chris Hegedus, with whom he has gone on to create a formidable body of work documenting almost 40 years of political and cultural change. **Interview by Eric Hynes**

When Donn Alan Pennebaker started making movies, Elvis Presley and Jackson Pollock were all the rage. When he wanted a particular piece of music for his first short film – the jazzy ode to an urban morning *Daybreak Express* (1953) – he showed up in person at Duke Ellington's house to ask permission. As part of a cohort of groundbreaking New York-based documentary filmmakers, which included Robert Drew and Albert and David Maysles, he witnessed and recorded the rise of John F. Kennedy (*Primary*, 1960), Bob Dylan (*Dont Look Back*, 1967), Jimi Hendrix (*Monterey Pop*, 1968) and David Bowie (*Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars*, 1973); with the same crew he innovated a method for recording picture and sound on the go that quite flatly – no hyperbole needed – revolutionised documentary filmmaking.

Suddenly the camera could go anywhere, and simultaneously capture every stray bit of unrehearsed dialogue, from Kennedy whispering strategy on the campaign trail to Dylan making digs at a young Donovan backstage. So the fact that Pennebaker is still turning up at Sheffield Doc/Fest, a kindly legend mingling with first-time filmmakers to present his own new feature, *Unlocking the Cage*, is rather mind-blowing.

That the 90-year-old Pennebaker – or Penny as he is often known – is still active and present in a contemporary film context is thanks to his longtime work and life partner, Chris Hegedus, who not only revived his career when they met in the late 1970s but seems to have been the creative motor of their partnership for the past few decades. You could put aside his storied pre-Hegedus films and still be left with one of the most important and dynamic filmographies in contemporary nonfiction. They made the best ever behind-the-scenes political film, about Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign (*The War Room*, 1993); one of the greatest, if criminally underrated, concert tour films (*Depeche Mode: 101*, 1989); and wildly entertaining documents of the times (*Town Bloody Hall*, their 1979 film about a panel discussion in 1971 between the writer Norman Mailer and a handful of feminists; and *Startup.com*, from 2001, which offers a behind-the-scenes look at the collapse

of a dotcom company during the internet bubble of the early noughties) among dozens of others. These days the 63-year-old Hegedus is still at the top of her game, emerging after years of patient observation and dogged commitment with *Unlocking the Cage*, which tracks the legal advances – and cultural repercussions – of activist attorney Steven Wise's fight to establish legal personhood for chimpanzees and other 'nonhuman animals'.

Over 90 minutes on an overcast Saturday morning in Sheffield, Pennebaker and Hegedus talked to *Sight & Sound* about their long careers, the birth and growth of their partnership, and how their roles have evolved over time and in light of technological advances – self-made and otherwise.

### ON PENNEBAKER AND HEGEDUS

**'There is not a single documentary filmmaker out there who has not been influenced in some way by D.A. Pennebaker. He liberated and revolutionised the medium.'**

Ken Burns in 'Variety' (2012)

**'They are such good and gentle and kind and helpful people. So many filmmakers have much to thank them for. What they did to save us from the documentary as it was known in the 1940s and 50s... If they hadn't come along... the documentary would essentially be nature films from the National Film Board of Canada, no offence.'**

Michael Moore (2014)

**'[Dont Look Back] is important not only for its documentation of one of America's greatest artists during his creative height, but also for its ability to show us a story without trying to explain any of its mystery. A wonderful film.'**

Barbara Kopple in 'Barbara Kopple: Interviews' (2015)

**Eric Hynes: Since there wasn't anything like a proper cinema education offered when you started, Penny, how did you wind your way to documentary filmmaking?**

**D.A. Pennebaker:** I'd been trained as an engineer. I expected to build highways and things like that. I thought it would be how I earned a living. But working for somebody seemed difficult – I didn't seem to get along with anybody that well. Now I had no idea what an artist was when I was coming out of engineering school – I just thought there were people who painted pictures. Then I met a guy named Francis Thompson. He made a film called *N.Y., N.Y.*, an abstract film of a day in the life of New York. Working with him over a year or two, helping him finish a film he'd started, I got to understand that an artist is a person who has no master – which means you're only responsible for your own life. And when I saw his film, I realised it was totally his work. There was never a script that he had to present to anybody, he just did it. And I thought, "I can do that."

**EH: Is that when you made your own New York City symphony, *Daybreak Express*?**

**DAP:** Yes. Basically it was based on his work.

**Chris Hegedus:** I came from experimental films, and Penny started in experimental films. So when we say you can make [the films] yourselves, we mean that it is one person's vision – or a shared vision – and you don't have to hire the industry. You can do it yourself, which was amazing.

**DAP:** What I began to understand was that it didn't matter how kindly the master was. Or even how helpful he was, making your film better than it might have been. None of those things mattered. What mattered is that it wasn't your idea any more. It had somehow become diffused. When I worked for *Life* magazine, at first that was the ideal job, surrounded by all these photographers, my heroes. And Robert Drew was a terrific person to work for. The first real film I ever made was called *David* [1961] about a musician, and about a place where a lot of junkies hung out. Pretty soon we were all making real movies instead of artificial things for the magazine. But in the course of that, I came to a point of crisis. I realised I had to leave *Life*. Which was hard – it was a job. It paid me well. I had a child coming.





GETTY IMAGES (2)

D.A. Pennebaker and Chris Hegedus (top); and Pennebaker (above, centre) filming Dylan for his chronicle of the musician's 1965 UK tour, *Dont Look Back*





**EH: Creatively you needed to go?**

**DAP:** I didn't think of it that way exactly. But something in my head said, "Time to go." I had to quit. I'll never have a job like this again, nobody will hire me, but I've got to go. Ricky [Leacock] joined me, and for two or three years we made films nobody saw. But the fact is that in those three years we had a great time being totally free. When the *Saturday Evening Post* asked Ricky to make the quintuplets film [*Happy Mother's Day*, 1963], and then saw it, didn't like it and wanted to re-edit it, we could say, "Fuck you, we're going to buy it back from you." We could be totally irresponsible. That was very heavy stuff – it made you feel very powerful but in a private way. We'd built our own cameras, and we had a place that would process the film [cheaply]. But we couldn't find anybody interested in even watching them, much less buying them. TV was not open to us. Certainly the movie houses weren't open to us. We didn't know what else to do, so we kept making little short films. It wasn't until Albert Grossman walked in and said, "Do you want to make a film with our client Bob Dylan?" that I jumped into making a feature. I just knew I couldn't have made the film at *Life*. Even though they might have let me, I wouldn't have made the same film.

**EH: Considering that you were approached to make *Dont Look Back*, and that freedom was so important for you, did you have to fight for creative control over the film, or negotiate what could or couldn't be shown?**

**DAP:** No, they just turned me loose. They didn't even ask me any questions about it.

**EH: What did you think of Dylan?**

**DAP:** I found Dylan's conversations kind of interesting. He talked like a Kerouac street kid, a jail kid – he had that quality. He reminded me a lot of Byron. He fascinated people, but he was very young, like Byron as a teenager. I always thought that had there been a filmmaker in Pisa filming Byron and that group, we'd still be looking at the film. I thought maybe that's the film I'm supposed to make here.

**EH: And here we are still looking at that film you made. What's it like to have spent three weeks with someone 50 years ago and still have people want to talk about it? Are you sick of it?**

**DAP:** It's like marrying your nurse. It doesn't make any sense, but that's what happened. I knew there was an audience for it, but when I showed it to people in the distribution business, they'd say it's too ratty looking. And it is a little ratty looking, I just thought it didn't matter. So it was all a fight. It was scaling other people's walls to try to get in. Then when I got the call to do *Monterey Pop*, to do a music festival, I had never shot anything with other people. I didn't know how to direct them, or tell them what to do. So I brought in the people who'd worked with me and knew how to use my cameras, gave them film every morning, and at night they gave it back and we processed it. I had no idea what they'd gotten until we saw the rushes. But it was a great way to do a music festival because you've got different views of things, not all directed by a single person.

**EH: Speaking of differing views and collaborations, Chris, how did you find your way to Penny?**

**CH:** We met in 1976. I had gone to an art college

in Nova Scotia, Canada, and didn't really know that women could be filmmakers because there were so few of them back then. But I became exposed to the more experimental, avant-garde filmmakers, of which some were women – Maya Deren, Shirley Clarke – which was very inspiring. Then I decided to put on a film festival with a friend, and we showed the *cinéma vérité* films that Penny and Ricky and Drew had made. I saw those films, and it just changed my life. They had characters and dramatic storylines, and everything you would find in a fiction film, except they were about real life. And it seemed like you could do them yourself. And that really appealed to me. So I moved to New York and made films with a group of other artists who were turning towards this kind of thing. The problem was the equipment – it was very, very expensive. So I decided to go to Bob Drew, and ask if he had a job. He was very nice, very apologetic, but he didn't have anything – and suggested that I go to see Pennebaker. Which I did. And we had an amazing conversation.

**DAP:** I had been hopelessly gone. She appeared and it renewed my faith in surviving.

**CH:** Penny was bankrupt at that time. But he called up the next day and said, "Well, I do have a job." He had basically a wall of films that he had shot but not edited, including one on Robert Kennedy and his kids going to public schools and singing Christmas carols. Another one was *Town Bloody Hall*. So we [edited] those and tried to get money for a project, and finally got a huge grant from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to make *The Energy War* [1978].

**EH: Penny, what was it like to work with Chris?**

**DAP:** She became a part of my brain, and I could

*I found Dylan's conversations kind of interesting. He talked like a Kerouac street kid, a jail kid. He reminded me a lot of Byron*

never separate her again from that. Any ideas that she had, even if I didn't take to them, I still watched and studied and learned from them.

**EH: Especially after *Dont Look Back*, and continuing after you started working together, you've repeatedly found your way back to movies about musicians. And what you both get and make of these musicians changes from movie to movie, whether it's Bowie as stage star in *Ziggy Stardust* or obsessive fandom in *Depeche Mode: 101*.**

**CH:** It has to do with access, and it has to do with different types of people. Depeche Mode, as much as we love them, aren't Bob Dylan. They don't have that poetic ascendancy. What was interesting was this hold they had on fans. They weren't going out with guitars – they were creating something new, and they were singing about depression and drugs and suicide. That's what you want to look for, these turning points in time when people and cultural zeitgeists are coming together to form something new.

**DAP:** We loved doing that film. It might be our favourite. It was like a little family. I see them occasionally if we're in London, like I'm their cousin or something. You feel that about some films. I feel that about George [Stephanopoulos, Bill Clinton's communications director] and James [Carville, Clinton's lead strategist] from *The War Room*. They'll always be like my relatives.

**CH:** If you go through something in your subject's life that's an extremely important moment, it bonds you, and you become part of their family forever.

**EH: It's hard to imagine a moment in anyone's life meaning more to them than how important that election was to Stephanopoulos and Carville. Has it happened the other way as well, where you've witnessed something so significant or traumatic that they can't be around you any more?**

**CH:** There are plenty of painful moments. You start these journeys and everybody thinks it's going to be great. Instead they do a belly-flop.



City symphony: *Daybreak Express* (1953)





**Depeche Mode: 101 (1989)**



**Dont Look Back (1967)**



**Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders from Mars (1973)**

That happened in *Kings of Pastry* [a 2009 film documenting a competition between French pastry chefs], where Jackie didn't get his life's dream. *Startup.com* was a similar story. We filmed the demise of their company. And for someone like Tom [Herman], the friend they kicked out of the company, it was very painful for him to have that exposed in a film. But he also went beyond it, and did a lot of amazing things afterwards. And he also realised, afterwards, that it was the story of so many other companies.

**EH:** It's not an easy thing to do, to capture the specifics of people at a specific time and place and also have it represent something larger. Too often that's forced, but in these it quite genuinely serves as both.

**DAP:** All of this is made possible by the amazing work of an invention that's relatively recent. It isn't just the camera – it's the camera attached to sync sound. With this device, if you're attentive, and really watch the action and don't try to tell your own version of the story, you can pretty much find out what really happened. That was never around before. It can be used in ways that we're just beginning to invent.

**EH:** I would say you already invented it.

**DAP:** Well, I was one of the people – it wasn't my invention alone. It isn't just the process of how you get the sound and the picture to match, it's what you're able to quietly watch and not try to make a fiction film out of. I don't think there's going to be any limit to length or structure when certain people realise the power they have in this process.

**CH:** It's the theatre of real life told in whatever way or style the artist creatively wants to do it. We did things in a very feature-length way, and films now are getting back into a serial type of storytelling, which is a little difficult for documentaries in the style we make. Life doesn't make individual dramatic arcs all the time.

**EH:** Do you think of the edit at all when you're shooting?

**CH:** I do. That's one of the good things about being a cameraperson – you know that you're going to need different shots to cover your story. It was especially important when we shot on film, because film rolls were only ten minutes long, and it was very expensive, so you're always running out or starting the camera when somebody was talking to their mother. So you have to make up all these breaks in some way or another, and I'm always thinking of that. Even now, when you can film and film and film, you still have to think, "How are you going to tell this story?"

**DAP:** You learn how to cover yourself. You know that you're going to need to cut a long conversation, so you look for people who are listening to fill in. It's like learning how to write sentences. You learn how to write film sentences.

**CH:** It was hard on our new film, *Unlocking the Cage*, because we recorded over such a long period of time.

**EH:** I would imagine that for a longer shoot like that, it would be counterproductive to think too much about shaping it into a larger narrative because you don't know the end.

**CH:** But you're forced to think about it because you have to raise money. And that's the other massive challenge in our careers as filmmakers. How do you fund these things? For that film, I must have edited ten different selling trailers. It was a continual struggle, taking the material and condensing it and making it bigger in order to try to raise money.

**EH:** What jobs do you each perform on your films, both in the filming and editing? Do you share the terrain or complement each other?

**CH:** Well, Penny likes to do almost no research. I might do a little more.

**EH:** Why no research?

**DAP:** Because that's what the film is about. That's why you do the film, to find out what you want to know.

**CH:** I like to not be too totally dumb when

I meet somebody, I like to know a little of their history. Penny doesn't even care about that – because he knows I'll do it, basically.

**DAP:** It's like a line Dylan would say, "What don't you know that you want to know?" It's kind of like that – you don't know what you don't know. The doing of a film is kind of a marvellous process of continually asking questions. Only instead of questioning it personally, you're questioning a kind of ongoing reality.

**CH:** For me it's like detective work. One of us is the detective trying to find the story while shooting it. The other is trying to find it in what you've shot, and make it into something that gives people a sense of what our experience was like going on this journey. And then physically doing it, since we both shoot on a film. I would do sound because Penny is not a very good sound person – he's always moving the microphone and making too much noise. In *The War Room*, we had this arrangement where I had radio mics on people, and I would direct Penny on what to shoot because I could hear everything that was going on. Editing is much more difficult. We usually get divorced once or twice in the editing.

**EH:** Are you in charge, generally, during the edit?

**CH:** In the past I would make a long rough cut of the film, and then when it's about two hours Penny would come in and switch it around. In this film Penny didn't edit at all.



**Political animals: The War Room (1993)**





Startup.com (2001)



Town Bloody Hall (1979)



Kings of Pastry (2009)

**EH:** Was it meaningful for you that one of the initial editing projects you inherited from Penny was *Town Bloody Hall*?

**CH:** I admired the women in the film so much. They were some of the first feminists who stood up and were writing and exploring why women should have equal rights. Plus it was such a strange event. It really is something for the time capsule. It was a type of conversation that doesn't happen publicly with as much passion any more. Just the outrageousness that went on during that event was incredible. So I was very happy to have that as one of our first projects. Except it was the worst shot thing I ever saw. I don't know what you guys were doing. It was like you were on LSD shooting a rock concert.

**DAP:** There were just three of us shooting it. The management of the theatre didn't want us there—he was chasing us around and trying to get us out of there. That's why I went up on stage, because I knew he wouldn't follow me. So I had to do everything from behind Norman Mailer's back.

**CH:** I tried to use that in the edit. To really make you feel like you were there, I left in all the swish pans and things that I would automatically cut out now from my films. But I think it gave people the impression of being in that audience, and of how raucous it was.

**EH:** Chris, how did you start working outside of your partnership with Penny, particularly in collaborating with other filmmakers on *Al Franken: God Spoke* [2006] and *Startup.com*?

**CH:** *Startup* was a project I had initiated. I had lived in Soho in the early 70s, and was part of the whole artist movement that pioneered that area of New York, so it was interesting to me that these techie types and young venture capitalists were taking it over again in this creative way. I met [co-director] Jehane Noujaim, who hadn't made any films but had a lot of access. Penny and I, we were not going to make another film if we didn't step into the digital realm, and he wasn't really ready to do that. In some ways he's never stepped into the digital realm, camera-wise. So I just decided to collaborate with Jehane to do that film. Then Nick Doob, with whom I made the *Al Franken* film, has been a partner for many years. It just seemed the two of us should go off and do it.

**EH:** Penny, was it hard for you that Chris went off and collaborated with those other filmmakers?

**DAP:** No. The ideal kind of arrangement for people who are partnering is that when you find something that joins you, you do it. And if you want to do something that's not joining you, you should be able to do that too. You're not in jail. Freedom is what you need the most.

Because that's the only way you can let the creative part of you come up and be visible.

**CH:** But I missed my collaboration with Penny, and that's why, among many other things, I decided to do *Kings of Pastry* with him. Even though he didn't do that much of it, I wanted him to be a part of it. And on *Unlocking the Cage*, he was kind of our mascot. He didn't come for many of the shoots or come to the editing room. But on a project that took as long as *Unlocking the Cage*, Penny was always the cheerleader, saying, "Yes this is a good idea, you need to keep going forward." And I need that. Because I'm kind of the pessimist in the relationship, and Penny's the eternal optimist.

**EH:** Why the aversion to shooting digital, Penny?

**CH:** The cameras have too many little buttons.

**DAP:** Yeah, my camera had only one button: start and stop. That was about all I could accommodate.

**CH:** We shot a few concert films in which we put the [digital] camera on his shoulder, set it up and had him shoot. He shot *Down from the Mountain* [a 2000 film showcasing a live performance


by the musicians behind the soundtrack for the Coen brothers' *O Brother, Where Art Thou?*] and *Only the Strong Survive* [a 2002 portrait of soul singers from the 60s and 70s playing live] that way. We used bigger cameras for those, and had lenses that resembled film cameras.

**DAP:** The one thing I wanted when I made my own camera was the ability to go on a stage or out to the desert. I wanted it to be totally uni-usable. There was no camera like that. Once I figured out how to do it, I loved the idea that I could go anywhere with it.

**CH:** Penny made me a camera. We had 'his and hers' cameras in the early days.

**DAP:** Hers had a green holder on it rather than a red one.

**CH:** He made me one of the types of cameras they shot *Monterey Pop* with, which was really nice. We had those together.

**DAP:** You make a film like you make a baby. There's no alternative to what's going to happen. I never experienced that before I met Chris. For me that was an awakening of sorts. I can't compare it to anything else. 

**i** A video essay exploring how D.A. Pennebaker pioneered the music video in *Dont Look Back* can be viewed this month at [bfi.org.uk/sightandsound](http://bfi.org.uk/sightandsound). Pennebaker's 1967 Dylan documentary will be released on Blu-ray by Criterion in the UK in August

*The thing I wanted when I made my own camera was the ability to go on a stage or out to the desert. I wanted it to be totally uni-usable*



Slow burn: Jimi Hendrix playing live in Monterey Pop (1968)



# AT THE OLD VIC

## GROUNDHOG DAY

BOOK BY DANNY RUBIN/MUSIC & LYRICS BY TIM MINCHIN

## GROUNDHOG DAY

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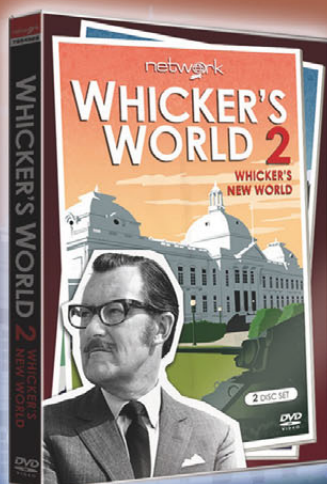
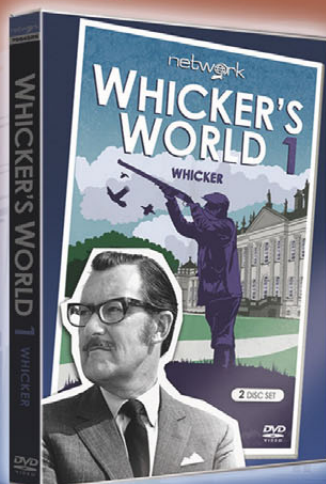
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## POINT OF VIEW

# GREEN UNPLEASANT LAND

The neurotic, gothic, swinging strain in British thrillers and horror of the 1970s adds up to a genre all of its own: all it needs is a name

By Kim Newman

The etymology is debated, but the print-the-legend version is that the French critic Nino Frank coined the term *film noir* to evoke Gallimard's *Série noire*, a thriller imprint known for distinctive black covers. Similarly, the Italian crime-suspense-horror *giallo* genre picked up its name from Mondadori, which published British and American mysteries with yellow jackets. *Noir* and *giallo* are claustrophobic, drawing on a limited set of themes, backdrops, characters, plots and images. Gun-toting private eyes in trenchcoats and fatal women in sheath dresses... black-gloved stalker-psycho-killers and designer-outfitted distressed heroines. There are isolated instances of *noir* and *giallo* from outside America and Italy, but these are national traditions, arising from specific cultural circumstances and concerns.

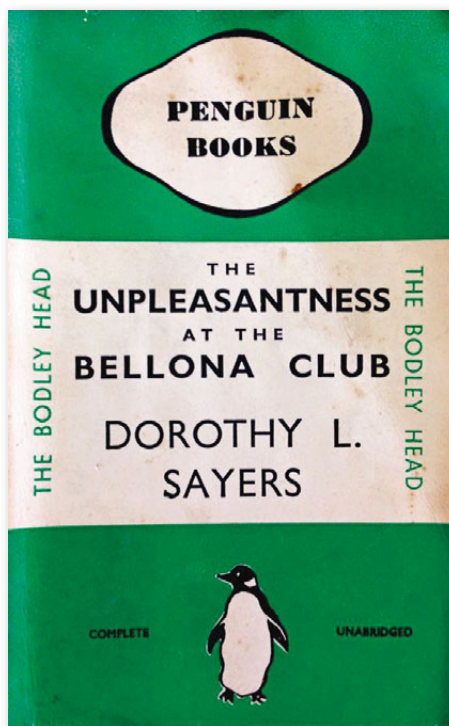
Roughly in parallel with the Italian *giallo* boom of the 1960s and 70s, a cycle of extravagant, stylised crime movies explored singularly British concerns. Straddling exploitation and psychedelic art, these gothicised, swinging thrillers and old dark house gloom-fests might usefully be explored as fresh territory for the genre map-makers. If we follow the habit of colour-coding mystery movies with reference to a leading paperback publisher, these might be called Green Penguin films. Penguin's crime line – inaugurated in 1935 with Dorothy L. Sayers's *The Unpleasantness at the Bellona Club* and Agatha Christie's *The Mysterious Affair at Styles* – used a green variant on the classic cover design. Even when the look evolved to feature illustrations, the spines (and most picture backgrounds) stayed green. Christie – an often unremarked major influence on *giallo* – and her competitors in the country house mystery trade were a mainstay of the Green Penguin list, but so were Americans like Raymond Chandler and Ed McBain.

Green Penguin Cinema might begin with Michael Powell's *Peeping Tom* (1960), with its mix of tabloid sensationalism, sado-erotic kink, plodding police procedural, self-referential jokes ("You don't get pictures like that in *Sight & Sound*"), lightly sent-up entertainment industry background (taking in Soho smut and horribly respectable British cinema), Eastmancolor delirium and horrific family drama. The lair of the killer is a London mansion sub-divided into poky flats, where pockets of resentment linger in the protagonist's traumatic memories (stored in film cans) and the alcohol-fuelled bitter insight of the heroine's blind mother. *Peeping Tom* is an outlier, now paid respectful attention forever denied the misshapen, genuinely sleazy but potent likes of *Cover Girl Killer* (1959), *Strip Tease Murder* (1963), *Night After Night After Night*

(1969), *The Fiend* (1971) and *The Playbirds* (1978). The critical mauling it received on release makes it seem a one-off, but many of its elements recurred in the next decade and a half – notably the collision of seedy and swinging London, which even Alfred Hitchcock finds baffling in *Frenzy* (1971), and a parade of outwardly nice, well-spoken, sensitive young men who turn out to be homicidal threats to unwary women. Witness: Hywel Bennett (*Twisted Nerve*, 1968); the Christie-derived *Endless Night*, 1972), Martin Potter (*Goodbye Gemini*, 1970), Mark Lester (*Night Hair Child*, 1970), Shane Briant (*Straight on till Morning*, 1972), Simon Ward (*I Start Counting*, 1969), Nicholas Clay (*The Night Digger*, 1971) and Ralph Bates (*Persecution*, 1974). A possible original for this character type is Lord Lebanon (Marius Goring) in George King's *The Case of the Frightened Lady* (1940), from an Edgar Wallace novel – a fey young strangler, thin-blooded at the end of his aristocratic line, joshing cheerfully with the police. He is sheltered by a dotty, doting mother (Helen Haye) who laments his death (while trying to kill the heroine) as "a thousand years of being great – gone out, like a candle in the wind". She doesn't just mean her family – she means Britain.

All the way back to James Whale's Hollywood-made *The Old Dark House* (1932), based on a novel about post-war malaise by J.B. Priestley,

*There's a sense that modern Britain is a crumbling mansion full of antique tat, inhabited by senile grotesques*



Where it started: an original 1935 green Penguin

there's a sense that modern Britain is a crumbling mansion full of antique tat, inhabited by senile grotesques who snipe at each other when they aren't savaging callow guests who come into their home reeking of neurotic modernity. This theme metamorphoses and metastasises in Green Penguin cinema, given a fillip by the likes of Joseph Losey's *The Servant* (1963), with its decadent master and aspirant butler changing places, and Peter Yates's *One Way Pendulum* (1964), from the play by N.F. Simpson, in which the eccentric Groomkirby family pursue demented hobbies (Jonathan Miller teaches speak-your-weight machines to sing 'Lizzie Borden': "You can't chop your mama up in Massachusetts"). Harold Pinter, who scripted *The Servant* from Robin Maugham's novel, essayed dramas of menace in decayed settings, which came to the cinema in undervalued, talkative, disturbing form in Clive Donner's *The Caretaker* (1963), William Friedkin's *The Birthday Party* (1968) – one of the odder products of the Amicus House of Horror – and Peter Hall's *The Homecoming* (1973). Pinter's violence is almost exclusively verbal, but any of these would make an apt double-bill partner with Michael Armstrong's pulpy *The Haunted House of Horror* (1969) or Freddie Francis's extraordinary *Mumsy Nanny Sonny & Girly* (1970). All the charades, sneers and bickering must eventually segue into stabbings in the groin.

Losey returned to an old dark house for *Secret Ceremony* (1968), with Mia Farrow as a child-woman who may (like Bennett in *Twisted Nerve*) be calculatedly shamming mental incapacity and Elizabeth Taylor as a tart drafted in off the streets for mother-daughter role-play. The British genre kaleidoscope *Performance* (1968), by Nicolas Roeg and Donald Cammell, also plays games in a decaying mansion – which has nurtured a magickal counterculture cell that undermines ancient certainties of class and decorum. In Jack Clayton's *Our Mother's House* (1967) – and, much later, Andrew Birkin's *The Cement Garden* (1993), from Ian McEwan's novel – a parent dies, leaving a brood of kids to make their own way in an old, large home which falls apart around them. Just as gangster James Fox is dragged into rocker Mick Jagger's trip, *Our Mother's House* has spiv Dirk Bogarde pulled into the enclosed, surprisingly dangerous world of a brood of children who have taken his name but refuse to be taken for fools. Stained-glass windows allow Mario Bava-style lighting effects to filter into dusty, dark rooms; if you watch a bunch of these films one after the other you eventually come to think they're all set in the same huge house.

The gothic mansions and family cruelties of Hammer horror and such lasting British classics as Thorold Dickinson's *Gaslight* (1940) and David Lean's *Great Expectations* (1946) survive into the 1970s, but a rising generation runs wild in gaggles that straddle hippie commune and satanic coven. Roddy McDowall's *Tam Lin* (1970) transposes a folk tale to the present day, with Ian McShane ensnared by witch-mother





Clockwise from top left: *Peeping Tom* (1960), *The Old Dark House* (1932), *Our Mother's House* (1967), *Twisted Nerve* (1968)

Ava Gardner and her coterie of wild children; comic mainstay Richard Wattis has a rare serious role as her poisonous, camp secretary. Andrew Sinclair's *Blue Blood* (1973) reprises elements of *The Servant* with a brutal Oliver Reed and a foppy Derek Jacobi in Longleat House; it is based on *The Carry-Cot*, a novel by the stately home's eccentric owner Alexander Thynne, whose wife Anna Gael appears as one of the genre's many moon-children. Peter Medak's *The Ruling Class* (1972), from Peter Barnes's play, bursts into song, soliloquy and ultra-violence as a mad earl (Peter O'Toole) is cured of the delusion that he's Jesus Christ only to become convinced that he's Jack the Ripper. The absurdist, junk-shop side of the swinging 60s is most obvious in The Beatles' *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* but an array of British pop-culture detritus bobs up in the songs of the Bonzo Dog Doo-Dah Band ('Hunting Tigers out in "India"', 1969) or the novels of Michael Moorcock (the *Dancers at the End of Time* trilogy, 1972-76). Medak's *Negatives* (1968) is even set in a junk shop, where Peter McNery, Glenda Jackson and Diane Cilento play sexual charades based on the home life of Dr Crippen and the aerial exploits of Baron von Richthofen.

While the Bond films chased clean lines and high tech, a rival strain engaged with clutter. The most profound Green Penguin portrait of Britain may be 'The House That Jack Built' (1966),

the episode of *The Avengers* in which Emma Peel (Diana Rigg), with-it in her outfits and humane outlook, is pitted against a mechanised death-trap disguised as yet another country house. This is revealed to be the revenge of an automation expert after Mrs Peel, having inherited a manufacturing company and taken a stand against cruel modernisation, fired him. Decorated with the usual waxed aspidochasms and elephant's-foot umbrella stands, this mansion also contains a buzzing, computerised artificial brain and an *art nouveau* murder maze. *Haunted House of Horror*, which harbours a paisley-shirted man-child knife-killer rather than spooks, is another Victorian



*Endless Night* (1972)

death-trap set to ensnare the Day-Glo-clad likes of Jill Haworth, Frankie Avalon and Richard O'Sullivan. Vernon Sewell's *Curse of the Crimson Altar* (1968) finds horror habitués Boris Karloff, Christopher Lee and Barbara Steele hiding in quiet rooms while body-painted flower children freak out downstairs. Subsequent houses are more focused on cruel and unusual punishment of the young by aged establishment figures – judicial in Pete Walker's *House of Whipcord* (1974), clerical in the same director's *House of Mortal Sin* (1976).

The wellspring of Green Penguin cinema, which flourished between the mid-60s and the mid-70s, was social upheaval. If *Billy Liar* (1963), *The Knack... And How to Get It* (1965) and *Morgan: A Suitable Case for Treatment* (1966) were the mainstream expressions of the mood of the times, these films were on the flipside, relishing and yet deeply worried about freedoms that were rude and dangerous. Fear of the young, rebellious and socially mobile is a recurrent theme, as is a recognition that the wallpaper is peeling and the gas cut off in what were formerly mansions – though sympathy is seldom with enfeebled or hypocritical traditionalists. Green Penguin cinema spans crime, mystery, horror, absurdist comedy and psycho-drama, and includes movies seen on release as plain genre fare and films conceived as arthouse indulgences. It is a house to which, inevitably, we shall return. 🏠



# LOCK, STOCK AND BARREL

Prince's eccentric, wildly variable filmography places him in a long line of black filmmakers trying to run their own careers

**By Sam Davies**

Shortly after Prince died, on 21 April, social media began to compile their own tribute anthology of his work on screen. As people shared snippets of live shows, interviews or videos, the wisdom of crowds sorted the innocuous from the viral. One clip shows Prince at a concert by James Brown and friends at the Beverly Theatre in Los Angeles in 1983. Called on stage by Brown and Michael Jackson, Prince outshines both as he grabs a guitar, scratches out a frantic solo, seduces a mic-stand and – apparently overcome by his own sex appeal – promptly exits stage left. Or there's Prince at the posthumous induction of George Harrison into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2004, waiting his turn as various rock legends strike tedious poses through 'While My Guitar Gently Weeps': in contrast, Prince's solo is like a string of firecrackers going off. At the end he flings his guitar straight upwards into the lighting rig – where it disappears, never to come down.

But Prince was also a filmmaker in his own right, a fact under-remarked in the many obituaries. Perhaps that was because his musical output, over a 38-year career, was so prodigious you could almost file him as a genre in his own right, while his filmography effectively began and burned out in the space of perhaps six years. And perhaps it was because his cinematic output described an unfortunate but undeniable arc from flawed brilliance (*Purple Rain* in 1984) to baffling mess (*Graffiti Bridge*, 1990) as, increasingly, he took directorial control.

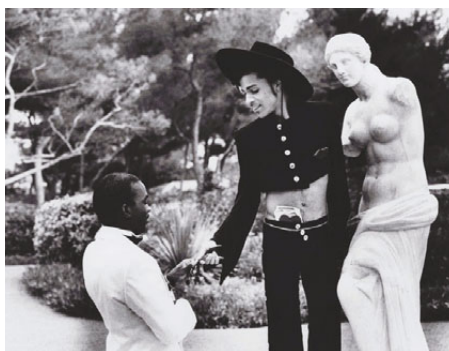
Watching *Purple Rain* now, it's striking how far it is dominated by the soundtrack – not just because it has some of Prince's most memorable songs ('Let's Go Crazy', 'Take Me with U', 'When Doves Cry', as well as the title track) but because of the sheer quantity of music. First-time director Albert Magnoli almost struggles to fit the songs in, using them as segues and piling on the montage sequences. Between the set-piece songs, even the incidental cues loom large – literally in the case of the John Carpenter-esque synth washes that Prince has sweeping down through moments of family crisis for his character, the Kid. The plotting is formulaic, the dialogue variable, but the cast's lack of acting experience often adds a clumsy naturalism: the near-*vérité* quality ties in with the concert crowd scenes, packed with shots of local extras, capturing faces and fashions from the Minneapolis club scene.

After *Purple Rain*'s box-office success and Best Song Oscar, 1986's *Under the Cherry Moon* is a bizarre cocktail of ideas, looks and in-jokes. Prince plays Christopher Tracy, a piano-player and gigolo on the make on the French Riviera, channelling Sammy Davis Jr, Scott Joplin and Rudolph Valentino almost at random. Kristin Scott Thomas is the trust-fund golden child he sets his sights on, Steven Berkoff her domineering father: the pair blurt out non sequiturs as if receiving their dialogue through



The limits of control: His Royal Purpleness in *Purple Rain* (1984)

hidden earpieces. The screenwriter, Becky Johnston, had graduated to Hollywood from Manhattan's No Wave cinema scene, and at times the film feels as improvised and unschooled in technique as anything by her Lower East Side contemporaries – Prince only took the director's chair after a snap decision on the second day of shooting to fire Mary Lambert. On top of the jumble of references and styles are some of his most avant-garde pop productions – the drum track on 'Christopher Tracy's Parade' sounds as if it's been lightly chewed by a tape machine.



*Under the Cherry Moon* (1986)

*'Under the Cherry Moon' is all froth and farce. But under its playful surface there are deeper tensions*

Compared with the heavy melodrama of *Purple Rain*, *Cherry Moon* is all froth and farce. But under its playful surface there are deeper tensions than in his debut, not least in the near-vengeful way in which Christopher and brother/sidekick Tricky



*Graffiti Bridge* (1990)



## PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA



Are the attitudes embodied in a few early films so repellent that we should simply steer clear of them?

**By Bryony Dixon**

There has for many years been one silent film I never wanted to see. Described to me in confidential tones by a friend and silent film expert, the central premise of *Behind the Door* (1919) revolted me so much that I vowed never to watch it – though since the film, while known among collectors and silent film archivists, was incomplete, the question never arose. So when the film restorer Rob Byrne told me he was restoring it for the San Francisco Silent Film Festival I was adamant that I wouldn't see it. Here is a contemporary short review that gives you an idea of the subject matter:

"Here are Hobart Bosworth and Wallace Beery in one of the grimmest war pictures made. Artistic, well directed and well acted, it may never return to the screen for excellent reasons, as its theme combines the hated German submarine and German atrocities. The Captain of a torpedoed vessel and his wife, last to leave, might be rescued by the submarine. The wife only is taken, for a dread fate, while her husband helplessly threatens a terrible vengeance."

"Dread fate" and "terrible vengeance" are euphemisms; what happens in the film is shockingly graphic. The friend who told me about the film mentioned a legendary intertitle it supposedly included – something along the lines of "and when they finished with her, they shot her out of the torpedo tube". Basically, what happens is that, having abandoned the man and captured the woman – he terms her a 'mermaid' – the German captain 'gives her' to his crew. Pretty blonde Jane Novak is last seen being clutched by brutish hands as she is forced through the hatchway. Later, as the German captain is relating these events, unaware that he is talking to the dead woman's husband, you see in flashback a bundle, evidently the woman, being loaded into the submarine's torpedo tubes. You can probably appreciate my reaction. I have never thought that gang rape was a subject fit for titillation; it makes my blood boil in a way that the ultimate fate of the German captain doesn't, even though it is notionally just as horrific (I'll just say that the American captain's pre-war profession was taxidermy and leave it at that).

In the end curiosity got the better of me. When the restoration of *Behind the Door* was premiered at the San Francisco Silent Film Festival in June, suitably late at night, I steeled myself to watch it. I'm glad that I did, because it is interesting for a number of reasons. As the review says, it is well made and acted – Wallace Beery as the submarine captain is especially good. The director Irvin Willat, who builds expertly to the horrific climax, told

*You see a bundle, evidently the woman, being loaded into the submarine's torpedo tubes*



Hobart Bosworth in *Behind the Door*

Kevin Brownlow it was the film that pleased him most. In the same interview he quoted that legendary intertitle, though it is not in the restored print – did it ever really exist? Rob Byrne didn't find it in the versions he worked from for his restoration. His analysis is that the film defies categorisation: "The juxtaposition of a tender love story and savage brutality leaves you asking whether the film is propaganda, a romance, a revenge drama, men at war, or as some have suggested, a horror film. In the end, I think the answer is 'all of the above.'"

Though the film was released in 1919, it was conceived (from a short story by Gouverneur Morris) and begun in the final days of World War I. It sits within a short-lived genre of atrocity stories; other examples include *Hearts of the World* (1918), directed by D.W. Griffith, which likewise contains a rape/revenge narrative, and arguably Winsor McCay's animation *The Sinking of the Lusitania* (1918) – which shows a German submarine crew gloating over the passenger vessel they have sunk and foregrounds the fate of women and babies to emphasise the horror.

*Behind the Door* echoes the tone of wartime propaganda in demonising the German characters but the first scenes feel almost like a western, with Hobart Bosworth's honourable small-town American taxidermist – who is of distant German extraction – surviving a vicious attack by an anti-German lynch mob. This makes him even more determined to prove his American credentials by joining up; but later he can fool the German captain into thinking him a kindred spirit, encouraging him to tell what happened to his wife. It is also possible to see in the film, and particularly its ending, traces of the *grand guignol* school of horror popular at the time – psychological horror stories in a contemporary setting without a supernatural element. None of this makes it any easier to stomach the misogyny at the film's core. ☹

set out to snare the rich, white object of their dreams, and 'bring her down to street level'. The issue of race is hidden in plain sight: empowered by *Purple Rain*'s box office, Prince had made the black-and-white cinematography (along with the Riviera setting) an absolute requirement. And *Cherry Moon* is arguably the high point of Prince's polymorphous perversity, as he seduces his targets with an uneasy mixture of mockery and coquettishness. (In the studio Prince was experimenting with Camille, an alter ego with a voice feminised by pitch-shifting). The most convincing romance is the quasi-incestuous one between Christopher and Tricky: at one point Tricky sits by Christopher's bathtub, lovingly scattering rose petals into it as he soaks.

After the flop of *Cherry Moon*, *Graffiti Bridge* (1990) is a brazen attempt to repeat the success of *Purple Rain* by reviving its characters for a sequel; the result is as odd, incoherent and airless as a fever dream. The impressionistic approach to plotting, characterisation and continuity has led some critics to categorise the film as a super-extended music video. But even on the level of spectacle and performance it underwhelms – it's hard to reconcile with the Prince whose 1987 concert film *Sign o' the Times* has been acclaimed as one of the greatest ever. While the viewer waits for the film to be magically resolved by the right song, Prince pads it out with guest spots for protégés, including Mavis Staples and Tevin Campbell. It's a folly – at times the unconvincing street scenery and Disney gauziness of the eponymous bridge (seemingly made of spraypainted Styrofoam) recall the architectural follies that Georgian aristocrats would dot round their estates. David Bowie couldn't stand the strain of both starring in and producing the music for *The Man Who Fell to Earth*; Prince, on each film after *Purple Rain*, was attempting to do both while also writing and directing.

*Graffiti Bridge* underscores the importance to Prince of artistic independence. His bitter dispute with his record label Warners in the 1990s, over their refusal to agree to his release schedule, is well known. But you can trace in the films the way his anger over control and ownership begins to simmer through the late 1980s. In *Purple Rain* the Kid has to learn to be less controlling, by accepting and performing the title song (credited in the narrative to his bandmates Wendy and Lisa). But *Under the Cherry Moon* revolves around two young black kids on the make, desperate for a big pay-off; the happy ending sees Tricky as the landlord of a Miami apartment block, with the French girl who used to chase him for rent on the Riviera now his tenant. In *Graffiti Bridge*, the Kid and his rival Morris battle over ownership of a club.

Prince financed the shooting of *Purple Rain*, and his subsequent films were produced by his own Purple Films and Paisley Park Films: he stands in a lineage of black filmmakers looking for an independent space within Hollywood. Like Melvin Van Peebles in the 1970s or Harry Belafonte with his company HarBel in the late 1950s, Prince wanted to graduate from starring to directing to controlling the means of production. The results may have been mixed but the scale of the ambition can only be admired. ☹



# THE NOS HAVE IT

The outstanding feature of this year's Oberhausen short film festival was a programme of political work from Latin America

By John Beagles

In the publication *Bad Feelings* (2015), produced by Arts Against Cuts and edited by Nina Power, the writers Lauren Berlant, Esther Leslie and David Graeber, among others, discuss – counter-intuitively – the virtues of “negation, negativity and a bottomless catalogue of negative emotions” such as hate, anger, revenge and destruction. For these authors the power of negation is both the cornerstone of any radical politics, driving the desire for something better, and the appropriate response to a brutal and brutalising society.

Considering these sentiments in relation to this year's International Short Film Festival Oberhausen, with its mix of shorts, artists' videos and animation, proved enlightening. As distinct from more exclusively formal, apolitical work, many of the best films in the festival – such as Louise Carrin's *Venusia* (2015) and Lav Diaz's *The Day Before the End* (2016), which both won major prizes here – demonstrated a desire to engage with the lives of people racked with pain, where the necessity of resisting, of saying 'No', loudly and proudly, was defiantly displayed.

This politicised aesthetic was most explicitly foregrounded in 'El Pueblo – Searching for Contemporary Latin America', a themed programme curated by Federico Windhausen. 'El Pueblo' was an ambitious combination of historical documentaries, contemporary short films and activist works for the web from across Latin America. Taking as its starting point the shifting meanings of the term '*el pueblo*' ('the people') and the phrase '*Somos el pueblo*' ('We are the people'), Windhausen's conceptual focus was on how “an increasingly influential strain of work is responding to the adversarial ideological climate of 21st-century Latin America by asking us to look carefully at the behavioural, material and environmental features of politically charged microspaces”. While older political action often configured the 'we' and 'the people' as exclusively male, undifferentiated and involved in macro forms of protest, for Windhausen the best work today has a far broader conception of who '*el pueblo*' might and could be, and where resistance might operate.

The historical documentary work *Somas +* (1985), made by Kollektiv, Pablo Salas and Pedro Chaskel, offered a powerful reminder of one different version of '*el pueblo*'. In this work the protests of a small group Chilean women against the injustices of the Pinochet regime were vividly portrayed – dressing up as respectable bourgeois types in the hope that the authorities would not beat a woman who might be connected to a rich, powerful man. Footage of the women being, nevertheless, remorselessly water-cannoned was deeply disturbing. But their rallying cry “We are more!” and their stubborn refusal to kneel before Pinochet's regime were powerful reminders of indefatigable courage, bravery and resistance.

In more recent works, digital technology



Edu Yatri Ioschpe's *Portrait Number 1 – an awakened people and their 1000 flags* (2013)

allowed the viewer the vicarious experience of being one of 'the people', in the crowd at the protest. This was most vividly and viscerally communicated in short documentary works such as the Brazilian Edu Yatri Ioschpe's *Portrait Number 1 – an awakened people and their 1000 flags* (2013) and the Chilean Juan Francisco González's *Filmic Map of a Country (6 parts)* (2015). Other works in 'El Pueblo' mixed documentary with more constructed modes of storytelling to offer new narratives about different versions of the people, all fighting to say 'No'.

*El palacio* by Nicolás Pereda (Mexico, 2013) depicted the daily routines of, and heard testimony from, a group of women working as the cleaners, servants and nannies of the rich and powerful. Texturally *El palacio* alternated between anthropological objectivity in the way it recorded their communal living – a memorable lingering shot of the women all cleaning their teeth prior



Nicolás Pereda's *El palacio* (2013)

*Many of the best films in the festival demonstrated a desire to engage with the lives of people racked with pain*

to starting a day's work – with more staged interludes in which they engaged in interviews, mock and real, for domestic employment. In the interviews, the women's desire for agency was coupled with their crushing experience of absolute powerlessness. One sequence had an unseen employer interviewing prospective servants, so monstrously indifferent to their status as human beings that it sent shudders down the spine. Against this was set a moment at which the power of 'No' potently reared its head, as a proud middle-aged woman talked back to the same inquisitor, demanding respect, a proper wage and acceptable working conditions.

However, for all the power of saying no, and the solidarity of the women in the face of such brutalisation, the film culminated in a horrifying interview with an eight-year-old girl, in which her prospective owner – not employer – adopting a nauseating tone, quizzed her about whether she enjoyed changing beds, cleaning and looking after children. In a heartbreaking, enraging moment, the camera captured the flickering realisation in the young girl's eyes that all the contours of her life were already mapped out – the horror of her dehumanisation, the reduction of her life to a tradeable commodity: utterly devastating. ☹



# CREST OF THE WAVE

As the profile of Czech cinema of the 60s and 70s continues to rise, it's time to revisit the innovative work of Drahomíra Vihanová

By Peter Hames

As the political and aesthetic importance of East-Central European cinema in the 1960s gains increasing recognition, so too does the work of female directors such as Vera Chytilová – witness the BFI's retrospective last year. In Czechoslovakia, Chytilová was arguably the most inventive of the group of 'New Wave' directors that included Milos Forman, Ivan Passer, Jirí Menzel and Jan Nemec.

But she was not on her own. The New Wave produced two other female directors – Ester Krumbachová and Drahomíra Vihanová – both of whom had the misfortune to make their feature debuts in the year following the Russian invasion of 1968. Krumbachová was already known as a screenwriter and designer, and worked with Chytilová (*Daisies*, 1966) and Nemec (*The Party and the Guests*, 1966), among others. Vihanová's work is less well-known, but a retrospective at the Barbican in London in June revealed what we've been missing.

Vihanová worked with Chytilová and other members of the 'Wave' while at the Prague Film School, making her graduation film, *Fugue on the Black Keys*, in 1964. It won four international awards. In some ways, the film can be compared to early films of Chytilová such as *Ceiling* (1961) and *A Bagful of Fleas* (1962), with its combination of formal innovation and *cinéma vérité*. These three films all illustrate Chytilová's notion that films should not resemble each other "like so many eggs".

After working as assistant director on Otakar Vávra's *Romance for a Bugle* (1966), Vihanová got her chance to direct a feature relatively late, in 1968, when she was 38 years old, with *A Squandered Sunday*. For a variety of reasons, including the fact that locations were occupied by the Red Army, she was unable to make the film until the following year. Aware of impending purges, her producers encouraged her to complete the film before the axe fell on Czechoslovak cinema in early 1970. It was one of five films banned prior to release; others were stopped in mid production. The film finally emerged at the 1988 Karlovy Vary festival, where a special screening was arranged under the auspices of Chytilová and the International Women's Group. It was not shown publicly until 1990.

*A Squandered Sunday* centres on a young man's experiences in the army and his feelings of alienation and boredom, culminating in suicide. Following his mother's funeral, we see images of closed windows, a watch tower and a dog burrowing in a street. Banality, repetition and emptiness make up his existence in a 'restricted area' which also constitutes a closed world of the absurd.

The film reflects the central character's state of mind through flashbacks, thoughts and present action combined in a continuous flow. Vihanová's experience as an editor (the subject in which she graduated) is much in evidence, together with an



Drahomíra Vihanová shooting *A Squandered Sunday*

unorthodox use of camera – extreme close-ups, poetic images both lyrical and hallucinogenic. The film possesses all those 'pessimistic' and avant-garde qualities the new regime would seek to oppose. Although not intended to refer directly to the political situation, the theme of alienation had an inevitable resonance.

Vihanová was unable to work for the next seven years but eventually gained the chance to move into documentaries – a career she had never considered. It taught her, she said, to be humble. By the mid-1980s she was internationally recognised, winning awards for such films as *Questions for Two Women* (1983) and *Behind the Window* (1989), in which she showed an ability to represent people and their imperfections with a genuine respect.

She continued to make documentaries after the fall of communism, and resumed her feature career with *The Fortress* (1994). First planned in 1969, the film was now updated to the second half of the 1980s. It was, Vihanová said, about "the effort to maintain one's identity, internal moral value and freedom of thought". The

*'A Squandered Sunday' possesses all those 'pessimistic' and avant-garde qualities the post-1968 regime would seek to oppose*

Hungarian actor György Cserhalmi plays an intellectual banned from his profession and working on measuring the water supply beneath the shadow of a nearby 13th-century fortress. The echoes of Kafka were deliberate; the film continues her exploration of themes of alienation, solitude and dream. A music student before she studied film, Vihanová is also much occupied with 'dramaturgical' sound. Stunningly shot in black and white, *The Fortress* has an attack and conviction frequently missing from long-nurtured projects; it won international attention and, though since condemned to obscurity, is well worth rediscovering. Her third feature *The Pilgrimage of Students Petr and Jacob* (2000) treated the issue of Czech-Roma relations through the story of a Roma who kills his wife because of her infidelity. An ambitious film, exploring law, morality, religion and ethics, it predictably failed to have an impact on domestic audiences.

She was unable to find funding for further features, but worked in television and became a professor at the Prague Film School. For Vihanová, contemporary (Czech) film had lost its appreciation of the power and magic of cinema. Contrasting the 1960s with the present, she notes, "What we tried to do, and all of our films from the 60s reflected that, we tried to say something... we were also aware of the responsibility that came with making our films." 📽



*Fugue on the Black Keys* (1964)



*Questions for Two Women* (1983)



★★★★★ "Lovingly crafted...  
full of characters you won't want to leave behind"  
Tim Robey, The Telegraph

# OUR LITTLE SISTER

A Film by  
**Kore-eda Hirokazu**



CURZON  
ARTIFICIAL EYE



★★★★★  
The Guardian

★★★★★  
The Observer

★★★★★  
The Times

★★★★★  
Time Out

★★★★★  
The Telegraph

★★★★★  
Little White Lies

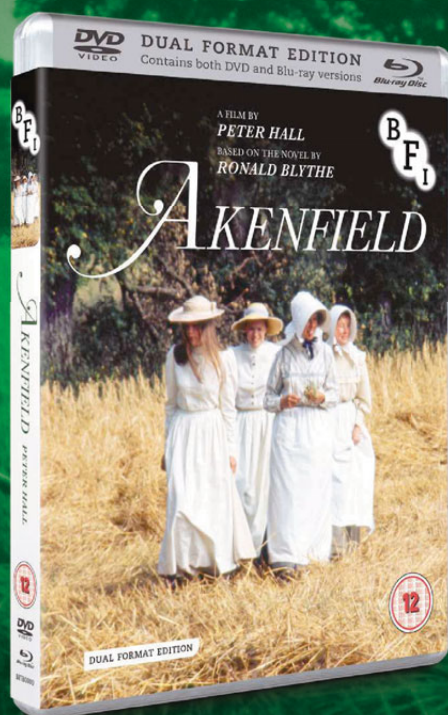


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# Reviews



## 90 **Sweet Bean**

*There are none of the nakedly autobiographical elements that have proved such a sticking point for viewers resistant to Kawase Naomi's rather self-conscious, self-orientalising strain of auteurism*



**64 Films of the Month**



**70 Films**



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## From Afar

Venezuela/Mexico/France 2015

Director: Lorenzo Vigas

### Reviewed by Demetrios Matheou

#### Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

With this quietly stunning first feature, writer/director Lorenzo Vigas became the first Venezuelan to win Venice's Golden Lion, in 2015. The achievement was far from a freakish anomaly. *From Afar* is an intelligent, daring, brilliantly constructed and acted film, announcing yet another Latin director who understands the virtue of restraint. His work here also resists easy categorisation: it's a film involving homosexuality and homophobia that isn't queer cinema; it offers an authentic view of his troubled country's capital, Caracas, with a story that could take place anywhere in the world.

Chiefly, it's about fathers and sons. Vigas's title may refer specifically to the 'look but don't touch' approach to sexual relations of his older protagonist Armando, but it also speaks of immutable damage, of the long shadows cast by abusive or absent parents over their children.

The opening sequence establishes the film's precise visual language and, through that, the personality of a determined loner whose alienation and stunted emotions are deep-rooted. As Armando cruises the streets, the camera's shallow depth of field reflects the city from his perspective, out of focus, as if Caracas is irrelevant save for the young men who will give him gratification. The reverse angle, past a close-up of a boy's face, has Armando looming indistinctly in the background, a spectre. He becomes concrete as he makes contact. Following the boy on to a bus, he sits next to him and brusquely, brazenly, pulls a wad of notes out of his pocket. The lack of respect in the transaction continues in Armando's apartment, where he quietly issues instructions – "take off your shirt," "pull down your pants" – while he sits, watches and masturbates.

Armando is not a sociopath. He's capable, responsible, courteous when he needs to be, able to be kind; his apartment is tasteful, full of books and old family photographs – of women, not men. He's not dangerous. He simply can't, or won't, share intimacy. It's a wonderful touch to make him a dental technician. A dentist would involve too much proximity to people; far better that he works alone with dentures, honing them to perfection – for this man is nothing if not fastidious – without having to deal with their owners.

A visit to Armando's sister gives a glimpse into the root cause of the dysfunction. He is no warmer or more talkative with her than with the boy. He tells her that their father "is back". She asserts, "It's normal for us to put it behind us, after so long." He'll have nothing of it. "Do you think it's normal? Did you forget?" And this is as much as we'll learn about Armando's childhood, or about his father's treatment of him. Like the best Latin screenplays, Vigas's script (based on a story he devised with the Mexican Guillermo Arriaga) is an object lesson in minimalism, with both dialogue and character motivation cut to the bone. Although we assume that the businessman Armando is following in his father, there is no interaction to confirm it; such ambiguities fuel the tension of the film.

But there is one other valuable piece of information from the two scenes with his sister: she and her partner are adopting a



Faraway, so close: Alfredo Costa as Armando and Luis Silva as Elder in Lorenzo Vigas's film

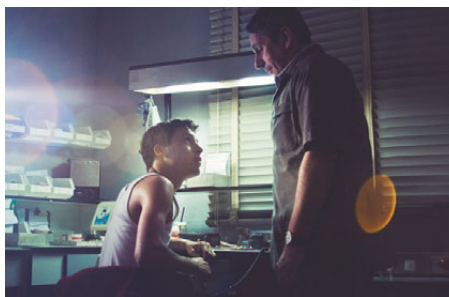
child. Daughters have their own different ways of dealing with trauma.

It takes the surly, animalistic teenager Elder to tempt Armando towards a greater connection. After he bashes him with one of his own figurines, Armando could chalk the attack down to experience. Instead he continues to approach the younger man, money no object and his safety unconsidered. The reason for his persistence is unclear; it is likely Armando does not know himself. Nevertheless, the more frequent their interactions – without the sexual contact that was once Armando's aim – the greater the bond that develops.

At the outset, Elder is an unappealing individual. With a sullen look that could kill,

a propensity towards extreme violence and lamentable table manners, he is not easily excused as a product of the streets. As Vigas divides attention between the two men, the film becomes a study in contrasts – between the middle-aged and young, middle-class and poor, professional and street thug, apparently gay and straight, a loner and someone with a family life, friends, a girlfriend. What they share, the subconscious glue perhaps, is errant, absent fathers. And eventually Armando's generosity – whether caring for Elder after he is injured or buying a car for him – has a profound effect on a youngster who has experienced nothing like it before.

Elder's response, the change in his character, is the most significant development in the film;



Luis Silva and Alfredo Castro



Alfredo Castro





This is a rare moment of levity. Minutes later, Elder makes an attempt to kiss Armando, who rebuffs him, in keeping with his controlling nature – but not before they have been seen. Elder's immediate ostracism by family and friends brings to mind another recent Venezuelan film, *Bad Hair* (itself a major winner, at San Sebastian in 2013), both films illustrating the degree of homophobia in a society where even a mother will desert her son.

Vigas came to his first feature after a career in documentaries and one short film. Like many of the breakout Latin American directors of the past 20 years, he has tapped into the network of established talent from the region, including the Mexicans Arriaga and director Michel Franco as producers (*From Afar* shares some of the slow-burn tension of Franco's films) and the Venezuelan actor Edgar Ramírez as an executive producer.

But the most significant collaborators are Chilean: Armstrong, who has shot most of Pablo Larraín's films, and Larraín regular Alfredo Castro as Armando. After his terrifying turns in *Tony Manero* (2008), *Post Mortem* (2010) and *The Club* (2015), Armando represents one of Castro's most straightforward, even ordinary characters; but the actor's trademark stillness and near-whispered delivery are as disconcerting as ever. Finely calibrating Armando's glances, half-hidden smiles and body language, he balances enigma with a palpable sense of a man with a watertight understanding of his comfort zone and a steely intent to preserve himself within it. He typifies a film that packs a heavy punch without seeming to move its hands, which makes for a very particular, and compelling, experience. **B**

*The film is a study in contrasts – between middle-aged and young, middle-class and poor, professional and street thug, apparently gay and straight*

whereas we might have expected him to treat Armando as a father figure, he goes further, not only responding to the older man's sexual gaze but upping the stakes considerably. Whether Elder is innately homosexual or driven by uncharted feelings of gratitude is another intriguing question left to us to answer; either way, it's ironic that having been moved to such an acute transformation, he's hung out to dry. By the end of the film a very effective performance from newcomer Luis Silva has invested the boy with considerable pathos.

It is largely through Elder that Vigas and his cinematographer Sergio Armstrong expand their visual range, by literally bringing more of the background action into focus when the boy is in the frame, introducing the bustling streets and markets, pool rooms, bars and massive housing projects. If narrowing the depth of field reveals Armando's state of isolation, so increasing it, in widescreen compositions teeming with life, reveals the day-to-day world and human interaction that he is resisting.

On the rare occasions when Armando does try to relate, he doesn't fit. Accompanying Elder to a birthday party – a vibrant working-class affair – the poor man is hilariously incongruous. "Dentures, madam," he says, announcing himself to Elder's mother. "At your service any time."

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Rodolfo Cova  
Guillermo Arriaga  
Michel Franco  
Lorenzo Vigas  
**Written by**  
Lorenzo Vigas  
Based on a story by  
Guillermo Arriaga,  
Lorenzo Vigas  
**Director of  
Photography**  
Sergio Armstrong G.

**Editor**  
Isabela Monteiro  
de Castro  
**Art Director**  
Matias Tikas  
**Sound Designer**  
Waldir Xavier  
**Costumes**  
Marisela Marín

©Lorenzo Vigas  
**Production  
Companies**  
Factor RH, Malandro  
Films, Lucia Films  
with the support  
of Centro Nacional  
Autónomo de  
Cinematografía  
– CNAC, Ciné en  
Construcción  
Toulouse  
A film by Lorenzo

Vigas  
A Factor RH, Malandro  
Films production  
Co-production:  
Lucia Films  
With the support  
of Centro Nacional  
Autónomo de  
Cinematografía  
Venezuela, Cinéma  
en Construcción  
Toulouse  
**Executive Producers**  
Edgar Ramírez  
Gabriel Ripstein

**Cast**  
**Alfredo Castro**  
Armando  
**Luis Silva**  
Elder  
**Jericó Montilla**  
Amelia  
**Catherina Cardozo**  
Maria  
**Jorge Luis Bosque**  
Fernando  
**Greymer Acosta**  
Palma  
**Auffer Camacho**  
Mermelada  
**Ivan Peña**  
Yoni  
**Joretis Ibarra**  
Deysi

**Yeimar Peralta**  
Yerlin  
**Scarlett Jaimes**  
Yuli  
**Ernesto Campos**  
Kleiber  
**Marcos Moreno**  
Manuel

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.661]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
ICA Cinema

Venezuelan  
theatrical title  
**Desde allá**

Armando is a middle-aged dental technician, living alone in Caracas. Cruising a poor neighbourhood, he offers young men money to return home with him for brief, non-contact sexual exchanges. But when Armando takes the surly teenager Elder home, the youth refuses to do as he is instructed and attacks and robs the older man.

Elder works in a garage but is also a street thug who is involved in a violent feud with his girlfriend's brothers. Undeterred by their first meeting, Armando continues to seek out the boy, who continues to take his money while rejecting his advances. In an office district, Armando also stalks a businessman, who may be his estranged father.

When Elder is attacked and seriously injured, Armando takes him back to his apartment and cares for him. His kindness softens the boy's aggression, and they become friends. Elder reveals that his father is a killer who is in prison; Armando says that he wishes his own father were dead.

Elder takes Armando to a family birthday party, and tries to kiss him. They are spotted, and Elder is ostracised by his family and friends. Elder moves in with Armando, sleeping on the couch. Together they watch the businessman. Later Elder returns home and declares that he has killed the man. He and Armando have sex for the first time. The next morning the boy goes to the shop to buy bread. Armando phones the police, and Elder is arrested on the street while Armando watches from a distance.



## A Poem Is a Naked Person

USA 1974/2015

Certificate 15 90m 3s

### Reviewed by Frances Morgan

Looking back on *Burden of Dreams*, Les Blank's 1982 film about the making of *Fitzcarraldo*, Werner Herzog reflects, "Much of what [Blank] filmed has nothing to do with the shooting of the film... sometimes what the native Indians are cooking is much more important than what we are doing filming this strange movie. Sometimes ants and insects in spider webs are much more important. He has his own little universe that he creates."

This ability to find beauty and resonance in the margins of a subject stood Blank, who died in 2013, in good stead throughout a long and prolific career. It is not only a poetic tendency, but in this case a useful one. *A Poem Is a Naked Person* is about the Oklahoma-born pianist, songwriter and producer Leon Russell in the same way that *Burden of Dreams* is about *Fitzcarraldo*, but Blank's 1974 documentary, unreleased until now, is even more elliptical in its approach to its subject. In *Burden of Dreams*, while Blank often looks away from the chaos of the *Fitzcarraldo* shoot to show us the human and animal lives going on around it, Herzog is on hand when needed to wax nihilistic about the jungle – "The trees are in misery. The birds are in misery, They do not sing – they screech in pain," and so on – or despair about Klaus Kinski. There is something subtly critical in Blank's gentle reminders that where Herzog sees "collective murder" in the jungle's ecosystem, Blank sees life, in all its teeming particularity. But Leon Russell, despite having instigated and co-produced *A Poem Is a Naked Person*, slips determinedly away from the centre of attention, revealing next to nothing about himself in a few meandering interviews about life and death.

This appears to be more than just camera shyness – at backstage parties and in his Tulsa studio, Russell is a watchful, reticent presence stationed behind a drink and a mane of grey hair. The space he leaves in the film is filled by garrulous hangers-on, sidemen and flamboyant wedding guests, by old-timers in the local Pickin' Parlor and young hippies backstage; and by the wet green world around them all, by the just-caught catfish and the snake flickering through the mud-brown river; and, of course, by the music, the animating force of many of Blank's films but rarely more necessary than here. Maureen Gosling, Blank's regular sound recordist, is glimpsed sometimes in shot, capturing the intimate yet vital performances so essential to this work.

There are two very rough continuous narratives in the film: one concerning sessions for Russell's country album *Hank Wilson's Back* – at least, the songs featured suggest this – and one with the shorter arc of a single evening at a stadium concert. In both, Russell springs into life, directing his crack team of studio and stage musicians in electric, gospel-inflected performances of well-known numbers such as 'I'll Take You There' and his own 'A Song for You'. The gig is filmed from a musician's point of view, as if you, too, were in Russell's band, locked into his locomotive piano groove. Music like this can seem interminable and overwrought



Southern comfort: Les Blank's enigmatic quarry, the country soul artist Leon Russell



Maureen Gosling

on record, yet thrilling when seen in action, with every band member building the song piece by piece. The vocals from Phyllis and Anne-Marie Lindsey are too urgent to be called merely 'backing'. The kinetic, neatly edited concert scenes play as interludes snapping the film out of the dreamy, psychedelic Southern-gothic languor into which it often drifts.

In the studio, country standards such as 'Roll in My Sweet Baby's Arms' and 'A Satisfied Mind' come to life, assisted by another group of musicians including Nashville steel-guitar veteran Pete Drake. Here, Russell relaxes, becomes graceful suddenly, steering this band that needs very little steering with palpable enjoyment, conducting a vocal modulation with a soft wave of his hand. While there is no mention of his biography – or indeed anybody's biography – at any point in the film, here you sense his years of graft as a Los Angeles session musician coming to the fore. Russell quite visibly knows a good take when he hears one.

Russell himself was not happy with his vague





*Russell is a watchful, reticent presence. The space he leaves in the film is filled by hangers-on, sidemen, wedding guests, old-timers and young hippies*

jump out from a subtler atmosphere in which one feels a sense of loss as well as tension – the nature of this loss isn't quite clear, but the rock 'n' roll community, as pictured here, appears fractious and paranoid. Young bands and artists are bullish and nakedly worried. Eric Andersen, a young folk singer, seems simultaneously to want to ask Russell's advice and to castigate him for being a star, out of touch with 'reality'. "Man, you're 42 or, I don't know, 38, or whatever you are..." he says, dismissively. Russell replies, quite truthfully, that he's "barely 30". The male egos in the studio are blustery and fragile. The girls backstage at the concert, queuing up for a kiss with a musician and laughing at the camera, are frighteningly young. Jim Franklin, whom we first see painting a cosmic undersea scene on the bottom of Russell's empty swimming pool, talks and talks as if he's afraid of silence, with a dystopian edge to his stoner patter.

Blank had shot the American counterculture in *God Respects Us When We Work, But Loves Us When We Dance* (1968), but at the time of *A Poem Is a Naked Person* he was documenting a very different musical world in two films about Cajun musicians, *Dry Wood* and *Hot Pepper* – in fact, he came initially to Russell's studio to work on the sound mixes for these films. Throughout his career, Blank returned to various American traditional musics, with studies of blues (*The Blues Accordin' to Lightnin' Hopkins*, 1968), Mexican Norteño music (*Chulas Fronteras*, 1976) and short films about Appalachian musicians, as well as another Cajun documentary, *J'ai Été Au Bal*, in 1990.

Implicit in these poetic ethnographies is a certain politics about traditional and working-class music-making. The films have their stars, of course, but there is an understanding that these top musicians exist in symbiosis with a whole community for whom making music is an action rather than a statement – what we romantically call a way of life, even if, by the time Blank was documenting these players, it was a contested and fragmenting way of life. In *A Poem Is a Naked Person*, Blank attempts to capture whatever constitutes this in the music taking place by and around Leon Russell, the way he might in any other community. But, rather than one musical tradition mutating over time, there are parallels and divergences between numerous ones: soul, gospel, rock, country and the old-time music that we see here played by a banjo trio, or in a scene-stealing performance by a fiddler called Mary Egan. Boundaries of race and class shift; ownership is questioned but never discussed.

As Blank maps this complex terrain with its competing pasts and presents, it is not surprising that landscape bleeds into his film, bringing with it all its beauty and grotesquerie. Ambrose Campbell, the celebrated Nigerian percussionist who came to Russell's band via Lagos and London, seems to get it the most. "There were things before him, and there will be things after him," he says of Russell. He could well have added, "and things around him".

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Denny Cordell  
Leon Russell  
**Filmed by**  
Les Blank  
**Edited by**  
Les Blank  
**Sound**  
Maureen Gosling

©1974. Leon Russell

©2015. Leon Russell  
& Les Blank Films Inc.  
**Production Company**  
Skyhill Films  
presents  
**Executive Producer**  
2015 Version:  
Harrod Blank

**With**  
Leon Russell

**In Colour**  
[1.33:1]  
**Part-subtitled**

**Distributor**  
Contemporary Films

Les Blank's documentary is a portrait of country soul artist Leon Russell and the musicians passing through his studio in Tulsa, Oklahoma, during the recording of his 1973 album 'Hank Wilson's Back'. Footage from a concert punctuates filmed interviews, recording sessions, private performances and local events such as a wedding, a parade and the demolition of a Tulsa hotel. Musicians featured include Willie Nelson, George Jones, country session player David Briggs, folk singer Eric Andersen, gospel artist Reverend Patrick Henderson and Nigerian percussion player Ambrose Campbell.

portrayal in *A Poem Is a Naked Person* and, having financed it, was in a position to deny its release. Blank was able to show it at private, not-for-profit screenings, but it wasn't until 2013, when Blank's son Harrod invited Russell to see the film again and reconsider his decision, that it was restored and has finally been made widely available. But one wonders if it was less the impressionistic vibe of the film that bothered Russell as much as a certain disturbing undercurrent. This is at its most apparent in sequences such as one in which a pet python – belonging to Texan painter Jim Franklin – eats a live chick, or the excruciating sight of the host of a parachute competition drinking a toast then chomping on the glass; both bring to mind the psychedelic-brutal vision of rural America evoked by Monte Hellman in *Cockfighter*, released the same year as *A Poem Is a Naked Person* should have been. (Perhaps not coincidentally, 1974 was also the year of *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.)

Yet Blank was not in the business of exploitation, and these moments of horror





**Ladies of the lake:** Elisabeth Moss and Katherine Waterston as Catherine and Virginia in Alex Ross Perry's film

## Queen of Earth

USA/Greece 2015

Director: Alex Ross Perry

Certificate 15 89m 40s

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Self-absorbed young people isolate themselves in a rural idyll. A potentially flirtatious conversation instead produces the observation, "I could murder you right now and no one would ever know." A man with a chainsaw lurks by the lake, nursing socioeconomic grudges. A horror movie is not precisely what Alex Ross Perry has made here, but horror-movie tropes certainly nibble at his film's edges – and the protracted psychological cruelty it depicts might have some viewers yearning for a bit of outright carnage just to break the tension.

Alternating the roles of victim and aggressor are Virginia (Katherine Waterston) and Catherine (Elisabeth Moss), old friends only because Catherine has thus far survived the regular culls with which Virginia claims to cleanse her social circle of "enemies". Catherine has not met with such forbearance from her recent boyfriend James, however; he has left her for another woman. "It's one of the worst tendencies of human nature," says Virginia, "to expect the best of others." Catherine has also lost her father, a famous artist for whom she worked in an

administrative capacity, to suicide; undercurrents suggest that his death was preceded by his implication in some major financial impropriety.

The oppressive psychodrama that Perry constructs around these hurt and hurtful individuals dramatises the interiority of a mental collapse in a fashion somewhat reminiscent of *Repulsion* (1965) or *Mulholland Dr.* (2001). Finding her grief met with scepticism and unkindness rather than the expected sympathy, Catherine retreats into paranoia, delusions and childlike self-soothing. A further layer, however, suggests that at least part of what we are seeing is Virginia's reconstruction of events in the wake of Catherine's suicide, with her own unsympathetic treatment of her friend heightened by a guilty conscience.

If many of the film's tonal and technical reference points date from before its cast and director were born – including the nervy, string-heavy score by Keegan DeWitt and the florid title font – the concerns forced to the fore are distinctly contemporary. The narcissism and entitlement with which American 'millennials' are often charged, on and off screen, here turn malignant. An aversion to personal connections – Virginia sheds anyone who disappoints her, Catherine says she's "not good with faces, or names" – consigns both women to loneliness. Wealth might supply them with unlimited wound-licking time, but

its troubling sources keep asserting themselves: Virginia's aunt and uncle, whose house she is occupying, are "terrible people", according to that chainsaw-wielding neighbour, while Catherine appears to have inherited the proceeds of her father ripping off his employees or investors.

Though one of Virginia's maxims is that "you can get out of someone else's cycle, but you can't get out of your own", the fact is that the crises being endured by these young women are not merely personal. Virginia and Catherine are part of a system in which their ostensible privilege has consequences both for themselves and for others, and drags a ramshackle load of responsibility and damage behind it. "Everything feels so close to me," Catherine observes in the first stages of her breakdown, "the good and the bad." The film's title might be read as referring not only to the immature self-regard that permits each woman to expect so much and give so little, but also to this sense of an inescapably interconnected universe, in which a subjective feeling of estrangement does not divest a person of responsibility for the fates and feelings of others. Each woman projects on to the other her fear of being considered unproductive and idle: Catherine charges Virginia with being "a bum", while Virginia icily notes Catherine's choice "to just hang out and do nothing", while doing exactly that herself. Meanwhile, Virginia's disruptive neighbour





*Perry is unflinching in observing emotional extremes, but bold in encouraging us to see the humour as well as the pain in what results*



Elisabeth Moss as Catherine, brightness alternating with malevolent mischief and pathetic frailty

Rich – with whom she hooks up apparently in order to antagonise Catherine – cuts through the angst and passive-aggressive behaviour like a comments-section troll going after a sad celebrity. An embodiment of Virginia's worst secret feelings, or of all the people Catherine has inadvertently wronged, or of everything an unsympathetic viewer might want to shout at the screen, Rich strikes at Catherine where she's most vulnerable, until – like Blanche DuBois laid low by Stanley Kowalski – she's reduced to pleading with him, "Why don't you like me?"

How much do we like our friends? How much do we sympathise with people in pain? What are we hiding from? Perry is unflinching in observing emotional extremes, but bold in encouraging us to see the humour as well as the pain in what results. It's possible to imagine one audience member laughing uproariously at *Queen of Earth* while another reads the same scenes as deeply tragic. Some of its most troubling and affecting moments have humour behind them, just as Catherine often laughs when she's crying. "I think the best hope for me now," she tells Virginia in a moment of determined fortitude, "is to not end up like my father." "How's that going?" responds Virginia, as ever empathetic with just a hint of sarcasm. "Hmm, it's touch and go," says Catherine, fighting to smile. A stranger ostensibly apologising to Catherine for asking her intrusive questions at a party chooses the wording, "I wasn't interested in you or anything about you last night."

Sophisticated work by Waterston and Moss helps to sustain the tonal ambiguity, and to elevate Virginia and Catherine far above the status of mere embodiments of moneyed indolence, female neurosis or their generation's quarter-life crisis. As in his previous films (the most recent of which, 2014's *Listen Up Philip*, is referenced when we see Virginia reading the novels of that film's character Ike Zimmerman), Perry makes clear his interest in obnoxiousness and self-indulgence, to an extent that may test some viewers' endurance. Yet Catherine's victimisation by her depression is also made fiercely apparent; the extent to which becomes more annoying the harder she tries not to be is reminiscent of David Foster Wallace's short story about self-perpetuating misery, 'The Depressed Person'. ("The depressed person was in terrible and unceasing emotional pain, and the impossibility of sharing or articulating this pain was itself a component of the pain and a contributing factor in its essential horror...").

Moss plays Catherine as not so much a wraith as a toddler: hectic brightness alternating with malevolent mischief and pathetic frailty. Waterston's Virginia is a cooler and crueller customer, aglow with intelligence and yet unwilling or unable to protect her friend. She *knows* what is happening to Catherine – one of the Zimmerman books she's seen reading is titled *Women and Madness* – but her knowledge does not produce action. It's a failure that might, depending on one's interpretation of the ending, leave this sui generis 'final girl' with a little metaphorical blood on her hands. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Elisabeth Moss  
Alex Ross Perry  
Adam Piotrowicz  
Joe Swanberg  
**Written by**  
Alex Ross Perry  
**Director of Photography**  
Sean Rice Williams  
**Edited by**  
Robert Greene  
**Production Designer**  
Anna Bak-Kvapil  
**Original Score**  
Keegan DeWitt  
**Sound Mixer**  
Clayton Castellanos  
**Costume Designer**  
Amanda Ford  
©Her Majesty  
September, LLC

**Production Companies**  
Forager Film  
Company presents  
in association  
with Falero House  
and Washington  
Square Films a Her  
Majesty September  
production  
An Alex Ross  
Perry film  
**Executive Produced by**  
Peter Gilbert  
Christos V.  
Konstantakopoulos  
Eddie Linker

**Cast**  
Elisabeth Moss  
Catherine Hewitt  
Katherine

**Waterston**  
Virginia Lowell,  
'Ginny'  
**Patrick Fugit**  
Rich  
**Kentucker Audley**  
James  
**Keith Poulson**  
Keith  
**Kate Lyn Shell**  
Michelle  
**Craig Butta**  
groundskeeper  
**In Colour**  
[L78:1]  
**Distributor**  
Eureka  
Entertainment

**New York, the present.** After her artist father has committed suicide and her boyfriend James has broken up with her, Catherine goes to visit her childhood friend Virginia at a countryside lake house owned by the latter's aunt and uncle. Catherine is fragile, and beset by memories of the previous summer, when James accompanied her to the house.

Flashbacks show that Catherine and Virginia were closely connected at this time, but that Virginia felt excluded by the couple, bickered with James and annoyed Catherine by bringing home a romantic interest of her own, sardonic neighbour Rich. In the presence of Rich and James, Virginia mocked and criticised Catherine, accusing her of squandering her potential as an artist by working for her well-known father.

Back in the present, Catherine and Virginia exchange stories about past failed relationships. Rich returns to the house, and is hostile towards Catherine. Catherine receives a phone call about her late father's business affairs. She begins to draw a portrait of Virginia, but breaks off when they argue about Rich. Walking around at night, Catherine finds a young man passed out in bushes and brings him into the house. Her relationship with both Rich and Virginia deteriorates as her behaviour becomes increasingly erratic. Catherine eats only crisps, leaves other food to decay in her room, starts small fires and complains of constant pain in her face, which she claims no doctor has been able to alleviate. Virginia hears Catherine talking on the phone, ostensibly to James, but while listening in on the extension she finds that there is no one on the other end. Virginia holds a party, but the crowds of strangers upset Catherine, and a woman confronts her about her father's involvement in a financial scam. The woman approaches her again in the morning. Catherine, now in a persistent state of distress, clashes with Rich once more, and berates him at length for his attitude towards her. She then attempts to embrace him, whereupon Virginia interrupts them and Catherine weeps and apologises.

A flashback shows them parting affectionately at the end of the previous summer. Catherine is then seen laughing uncontrollably by the lake, and Virginia alone and upset in the house, with Catherine's unfinished portrait of her.



# Aferim!

Romania/Bulgaria/Czech Republic/France/Germany 2015

Director: Radu Jude

Certificate 18 105m 45s

## Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

When the caption in the opening sequence of *Aferim!* announces "Wallachia, 1835", we're not in Romania any more: at that time, the country didn't yet exist. Thus Radu Jude's third feature would at first appear to be covering fresh territory compared to most of the vital, rejuvenated Romanian cinema of the past decade or so, where the focus has largely been on contemporary drama as portal through which to explore the nation's challenging moral transition from totalitarianism towards democracy and capitalism.

Shot in black-and-white and unfolding in the rugged, desolate mountains and valleys of Carpathia, this pursuit story involving two feudal functionaries and an escaped Roma slave – like Michael Haneke's *The White Ribbon* (2009) or Edgar Reitz's *Home from Home: Chronicle of a Vision* (2013) – renders its historical era so thoroughly that it seems less a matter of judicious costume and production design than walking into an all-enveloping nitrate image from the early days of photography. However, much as the film's landscape vistas in particular radiate a captivating pre-industrial serenity, visual splendour is not the prime agenda here, and there's scant consolation to be taken from this visit to the agrarian past.

The word we hear most often is 'crows'. That's the dismissive term for the darker-complexioned Roma people we find at the very bottom of the film's lucid account of social stratification. On a higher level there is the boyar, or landowner, whose estate is run on Roma slave labour, as indeed are the church properties we see in the course of the cross-country journey undertaken by two of the boyar's underlings – the middle-aged blowhard constable Costandin and his geeky teenage son. At the very bottom of the heap are the Roma, since those of them who are not enslaved are reduced to panning for gold in the rivers – for a minimal return, if their ragged clothes and naked children are anything to go by.

Still, the more we hear Costandin expound in Teo Corban's marvellously demonstrative but insightful performance, the more we sense a certain anxiety behind the virtually endless racist invective, since Wallachia is itself an outpost of the Ottoman empire, its citizens essentially supine and colonised. The title *Aferim!* is the Turkish equivalent of 'Bravo!', to be used with ironic scorn by the Wallachians when one of their countrymen messes up big time. All of which puts the onscreen treatment of the Roma into historical context, though as Jude's camera plays the role of neutral observer in the face of boundless iniquity and suffering, the audience is left to consider whether the central characters' attitudes and behaviour are so much of their time that we can expect nothing else of them. And if we follow that line of thought, what would it mean for our relationship to our own troubled times? Is go-with-the-flow really good enough?

It's a really resourceful piece of construction from Jude, since the film intrigues us as a survey of a specific sociohistorical moment, before revealing itself as a timeless portrait of individual conscience. In that sense, it rather resembles Aleksei German's *Hard to Be a God* (2013), in which the past is another planet and



Home of the slave: Cuzin Toma, Mihai Comanoiu, Teo Corban

the challenge for the earthling visitors is to retain some flicker of humanity while wholly submerged in medieval brutality. Here, too, while the story of the pursuit keeps the plot ticking over and the no-holds-barred realisation of 1835 Wallachia is bracingly impressive, the interpretative key is in picking up on those moments of kindness and reflection that suggest the degrees by which Costandin and his son are thinking beyond their surroundings or are, in turn, limited by them. The older man sharing some food and wine with the captive, in stocks and slung over a horse, is one thing, while the extent to which the constable is also prepared

to believe in the fairness and magnanimity of the system he serves, entirely another.

That said, once we grasp the film's astute working methods, it has basically played its cards, and there's a slight loss in momentum as the final stretch plays out much as one would expect. Still, Jude's achievement, in expanding his own storytelling horizons from the tightly framed social satires of his previous two features, is still something to marvel at. Moreover, contrary to first impressions, *Aferim!* is not strictly about the past, for in its piercing attention to individual values it remains very much a film with universal resonance for the here and now. **S**

## Credits and Synopsis

**Producer**  
Ada Solomon  
**Screenplay**  
Radu Jude  
Florin Lazarescu  
**Director of Photography**  
Marius Panduru  
**Editor**  
Catlin Cristutiu  
**Production Designer**  
Augustina Stanciu  
**Music**  
Trei Parale  
**Sound Recordist**  
Momchil Bozhkov  
**Costumes**  
Dana Paparuz

©HI Film, Klas Film, Endorfilm  
**Production Companies**  
Beta Cinema presents a HI Film production in co-production with Klas Film, Endorfilm, Mulberry Development, Nu Boyana Film Studios, Production XMG Media, Abis Studio in association with EZ Films

with the participation of Bulgarian National Television, HBO Romania  
Made with the support of Eurimages, CNC - Centrul National al Cinematografiei, BFF - Bulgarian Film Fund, CFF - State Cinematography Fund Czech Republic, MEDIA Programme of the European Union, Nu Boyana, BGTV, HBO Romania  
**Producers:** Hi Film, Klas Film, Endorfilm, Mulberry Development  
**Executive Producers**  
Valentino Rudolf  
Ioana Draghici

### Cast

**Teo Corban**  
Costandin  
**Cuzin Toma**  
Carfin Pandolean  
**Mihai Comanoiu**  
Ionita  
**Alberto Dinache**

**Tintiric**  
Alexandru Dabija  
Boyar lordache  
**Cindescu**  
Alexandru Bindea  
priest  
**Mihaela Sirbu**  
Sultana  
**Luminita Gheorghiu**  
craftsman's wife  
**Victor Rebengiuc**  
craftsman  
**Adina Cristescu**  
Zambila  
**Serban Pavlu**  
traveller at the inn  
**Paul Fister**  
Zapciu  
**Gabriel Spahiu**  
Vasile  
**Gheorghe Frunza**  
fisherman

**In Black & White**  
[2.35:1]  
Subtitles

**Distributor**  
Studiocanal Limited

Wallachia, 1835. Costandin, an experienced constable, and his teenage son Ionita, who has aspirations to join the army, are riding in search of a fugitive Roma slave, Carfin. He's the property of their master, landowner Boyar lordache. As the pair follow Carfin's trail, the foul-mouthed Costandin volubly expresses his superiority over the Roma underclass. His sentiments are echoed by the orthodox priest and monks encountered on the journey, whose antipathy is based on deep religious intolerance. Eventually the duo track their prey to the home of a kindly basket-weaver who's sheltering him, and apprehend both Carfin and a little Roma boy, Tintiric. Carfin's feet are placed in stocks and he's slung over Costandin's horse, but Tintiric is soon sold on to a new owner at a nearby market. Costandin and Ionita celebrate their success by stopping off at an inn, where both enjoy the attentions of a hard-working prostitute, though they're kind enough to share a little food with their captive. Carfin explains that his true crime was giving in to this mistress's sexual demands; he reveals his past service to an aristocratic family with whom he visited Vienna and Paris, and pleads to be let go. Costandin is certain that Carfin will only get a ticking off from his master, though Ionita suggests they release him. Back at lordache's mansion, the boyar dismisses Costandin's entreaties on Carfin's behalf, and publicly castrates the errant slave. Costandin and Ionita are in reflective mood as they ride home.



## Author The JT LeRoy Story

USA 2016

Director: Jeff Feuerzeig

Certificate 15 111m 1s

### Reviewed by Roger Clarke

The sexually explicit autobiographical fictions of an individual who purported to be an infected, abused teenage rent boy became pretty much the hottest thing in the world of books and publishing in the late 1990s. Author JT LeRoy's second novel, *The Heart Is Deceitful Above All Things*, was even turned into a film by *giallo* princess Asia Argento, premiering at Cannes in 2004. Somehow the overheated gothic romance of the story caught a public mood – a child prodigy, physically beautiful, sickly yet triumphant after maternal abandonment and sexual exploitation; ahead of the times, he was also transgendering. People felt happy to care about him. It was glorious to care about him.

In reality, JT LeRoy had been summoned from the ether by a middle-aged Brooklyn woman named Laura Albert when she rang a child helpline during a mental-health episode, pretending to be a young boy. For a while this persona spoke only on the phone, initially to famous writers, faxing them sensational stories, and then subsequently to rock celebrities. After a while, the JT LeRoy bandwagon became so huge that Albert drew her sister-in-law Savannah Knoop into her web. Knoop became the meet-and-greet avatar in a wig, whom this reviewer met in 2005. To keep an eye on Savannah at readings, Albert developed a third persona, JT's manager Speedie, who sported a garbled British accent. Still greedy for more exposure, Albert then developed a fourth character, Emily Frasier, a singer who performed songs and lyrics purportedly written by JT. Eventually this bewigged conceit fell apart when the *New York Times* exposed Albert in 2006. It was as if Little Britain had tried to do Dennis Cooper.

Although Jeff Feuerzeig's documentary is




Masquerade: JT LeRoy/Savannah Knoop

more Albert-friendly than its predecessor – *The Cult of JT LeRoy* by Marjorie Sturm (2014), from which the author was completely absent – she doesn't do herself many favours on screen. One of the film's darker revelations is that Albert used the gender-reorientation story as a cover for her gastric-band surgery. Having used and exploited connections with gay writers and filmmakers on her ascent, she complains about the "gay mafia" when she is exposed. Here she's slender, self-possessed, dressed in a kind of Californian boho chic – very different from her 1990s self – but she sits against a backdrop of her own worthless prose, telling yet more stories of her tortured past, most of them unverifiable.

Albert's huge cache of taped phone calls is a great asset to the film. (The best moments involve Courtney Love doing a "small" line of coke, and Billy Corgan seemingly not much bothered when the deceit is revealed to him.) Her dismissal of Asia Argento, who accrued considerable professional damage to her reputation when she got behind the whole JT LeRoy narrative, is rather magnificent, implying that Asia had sex with Knoop posing as JT – as if "seeing Savannah's puss wasn't a tip-off".

The whole business of glamorous big-character imposture recalls earlier scandals along the lines of Thomas Chatterton or George Psalmanazar, or Virginia Woolf's Abyssinian Prince practical joke from 1910. How much of the money did Albert keep? The answer seems to be nearly all of it. She only ended up paying \$350,000 to one Antidote Films, who successfully argued for fraud in the signing of a contract for an adaptation of the book *Sarah*.

More a story of chaotic narcissism than of planned malevolence, this is a near-perfect self-satire of modern celebrity culture. A documentary that raises as many questions as it answers, it's the latest instalment of a fascinating story. 

## Bayou Maharajah

USA 2016


Director: Lily Keber

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

So much of a musician's posthumous legacy is dependent on the recordings they leave behind, and New Orleans keyboard legend James Booker isn't necessarily well served by his fairly slim discography. That's no comment on the quality of his musicianship, since his ornate, rolling style – somehow combining bluesy grit, the freedom of jazz and an overlay from the European classical tradition – has claims to being unique. It is perhaps more a reflection on a wayward, capricious misfit who wasn't always prepared to discipline himself to the demands of the music industry. All of which helps to explain why Booker is simply not as well known as his talent deserves, and why this sincere, authoritative documentary is so very welcome as an eye-opening primer on a true New Orleans legend.

Booker's friend and colleague Dr John, another Louisiana maverick, memorably described him as "the best black, gay, one-eyed junkie piano genius New Orleans has ever produced", and Lily Keber's film confirms that this is no exaggeration. She makes good use of TV coverage from the European jazz-festival circuit of the late 1970s, where Booker's mesmeric playing and emotive accompanying vocals left audiences in raptures, but it's in the reminiscences of a wide array of friends, fellow musicians and slightly bemused producers that the full distinctive flavour of the man comes out. When asked, for instance, how Booker lost his left eye, the answers vary to a hilarious degree: an incident in Louisiana's Angola prison while serving time; irate drug dealers pulling it out with pliers; the involvement of the CIA; something to do with Jackie Kennedy; or an unfortunate fight with Ringo Starr (thus explaining why Booker often wore a patch with a star on it).

Clearly, sorting out the truth from the myth was one of the tasks facing the film. Keber does a solid job of laying out the trajectory of Booker's professional progress, from the prodigious teen working the clubs on a fake ID, through the sideman years playing with a host of marquee names including Ray Charles and Aretha Franklin, to the realisation that he could headline in Europe as a solo artist, and the disappointment he felt on his return to a marginal existence working small clubs in New Orleans – the clock ticking all the while as his body gave out from years of heroin and booze.

Harry Connick Jr, whose father, the district attorney for New Orleans, was an unlikely confidant and protector of the somewhat outrageous Booker, does a terrific job of sitting down at the piano and laying out the daunting compositional and technical complexity of Booker's signature style. However, when it comes to a deeper comprehension of the man's rather particular psychology, a combustible mix of self-destructiveness and conspiracy-theory paranoia, illumination is, perhaps understandably, harder to come by. Indeed, Keber seems less than willing to intrude on Booker's homosexuality, while recognising it as part of his makeup, and holds back on questioning whether the early loss of his mother and musically gifted older sister played some role in the mental-health issues that marked his later life. 

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Jeff Feuerzeig  
Jim Czarnecki  
Danny Gabai  
Molly Thompson  
Brett Ratner

**Written by**  
Jeff Feuerzeig  
**Director of Photography**  
Richard Henkels

**Edited by**  
Michelle M. Witten  
**Composer**  
Walter Werzowa  
**Production Sound Mixers**  
Robin Reinfried  
Daniel S. McCoy

Peter Ølsted  
Joshua Hilson  
Miliken Gardner  
Spencer Smith

©A&E Television

Networks  
and RatPac  
Documentary  
Films, LLC

**Production Companies**

A&E IndieFilms,  
RatPac  
Documentary  
Films in association  
with Complex  
Corporation present  
a Vice production

**Executive Producers**

Robert Sharenow  
Robert DeBitetto  
James Packer  
Marie Therese  
Guirgis  
Eddy Moretti  
Shane Smith  
Henry S. Rosenthal

**In Colour**

[1.85:1]

**Part-subtitled**

**Distributor**

Dogwoof

A documentary about the fashionable author JT LeRoy, who in January 2006 was unmasked as a fraud by the *New York Times*. At the time, LeRoy was supposedly a teenager with HIV who had survived a terrible childhood of prostitution, abandonment and drug abuse. These experiences supposedly fed into his three works of fiction, which were lauded by the likes of Gus Van Sant and Bono. But in reality 'JT LeRoy' was Laura Albert, a middle-aged woman battling mental-health issues. As LeRoy's fame and notoriety snowballed, Albert asked her sister-in-law Savannah Knoop to impersonate the teenage author in public. The documentary mostly tells Albert's side of the story, and includes many of the phone calls she taped during the period.





It had to bayou: James Booker

Formally, the film is relatively conventional, but its content puts much forgotten treasure on display, not least some atmospherically grainy early video of flamboyant 1970s streetlife. In the end, it's an affecting elegy for Booker, dead at 43 in a hospital waiting room, but it also offers a haunting look back at an authentic, carnivalesque New Orleans that may now too largely be confined to the past. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Lily Keber  
Nathaniel Kohn  
Mark Sperling  
Stephen F. Rose  
**Written by**  
Lily Keber  
Tim Watson  
Aimée Toledano  
**Cinematography**  
David S. White  
**Editors**  
Tim Watson  
Aimée Toledano  
**Sound Recordist**  
Eric Laws

@Bayou  
Maharajah, LLC  
**Production Companies**  
A Mairzy Doats  
production  
Additional

support provided  
by Louisiana  
Entertainment,  
Threadhead  
Cultural Foundation,  
Jazzfest Community  
Partnership  
Grants, IFP and all  
of our generous  
Kickstarter donors  
**Executive Producers**  
Mark Sperling  
Brooke Sperling  
Stephen F. Rose  
Kathleen  
Zaworski-Burke  
Dick Connette  
Greg Fleeman  
Randy Fertel

narrator  
**Ron Cuccia**

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]

**Distributor**  
MusicFilmNetwork

A documentary portrait of New Orleans piano player James Booker, who blended blues, jazz and classical influences with passionate vocals. The film includes archive footage of his performances through the late 1970s until his death in 1983, while newly shot interviews with musicians and club owners reveal a complex and beguiling figure. Booker lost an eye under mysterious circumstances, and his long-term alcohol and substance abuse, combined with mental-health issues, prevented him from achieving the fame that his music deserved. He toured as a sideman with a wide roster of famous blues and soul performers, and his own career took an upturn when he travelled to Europe as a solo artist in 1977, delighting appreciative festival audiences. However, on returning to New Orleans he found himself again working in small local venues. Despite the best efforts of his loyal supporters, his drinking and drug abuse eventually led to his death at the age of only 43.

## The BFG

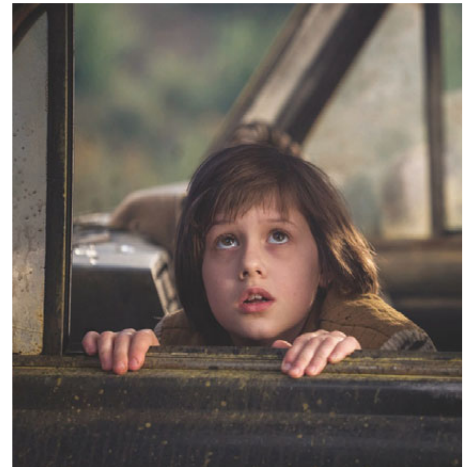
USA/India  
Director: Steven Spielberg  
Certificate PG 117m 1s

### Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Despite combining the powers of two of the 20th century's greatest chroniclers of childhood, there's something oddly generic about Steven Spielberg's adaptation of Roald Dahl's *The BFG*. The skeleton of the story is there – orphaned girl is spirited away by a friendly giant, has great adventures, then ends up in a beautiful new home feeling more loved than she's ever felt in her life – but, as is true of the vast majority of Dahl's novels restaged for the big screen, this one has had its edges cut off. Save for a moment when Sophie (Ruby Barnhill) tests the Big Friendly Giant's dedication to her by jumping off a ledge, there's very little of the requisite darkness, naughtiness and insight that underpin his work and make it memorable.

While some of the more problematic bits make sense to excise (the beheading-loving Sultan of Baghdad is thankfully absent, but then so is the King of Sweden), what we're left with are heaps of cinematic sugar that are indistinguishable from any other action films for kids. When the people-eating giants confront the BFG for harbouring a "human bean" and ransack his house, Sophie attempts to hide inside a hollowed-out tree in its centre. This is a perfectly fine bit of suspense (and allows Sophie to find the room of the BFG's previous human friend, who *was* eaten by giants, for a dose of pathos), but the chase goes on and on for several minutes, and quickly feels like padding. Perhaps in another bid to keep things from being too scary, the film's glowing CGI makes little effort to seem photorealistic, which makes the aforementioned sequence even clumsier. Once the image of Barnhill endlessly tromping around an empty green-screen room enters your head, none of the film's forced 'wonder' can remove it.

As is to be expected in Spielberg's oeuvre, there are plenty of instances where Barnhill turns to stare at something off screen and looks



Big trouble: Ruby Barnhill

amazed – yet unlike the brontosaurus in *Jurassic Park* or the malevolent TV ghosts in *Poltergeist* (apologies to Tobe Hooper), what are meant to be big reveals are pretty underwhelming, save for the strange land where Sophie and the BFG hunt for dreams. Barnhill's acting – which aims for chirrupy and goes straight into shrill – also carries a falseness that undermines most of the scenes. The unfailing Mark Rylance's magnificent vocal performance as the BFG exudes warmth, though regrettably the giant's "crumple" command of the English language, which is a delight on the page, becomes insufferably whimsical after an hour or so. It's unclear whether or not keeping more of the character's shouty rants about humanity from the book could've prevented this; as a sad reminder of the times we live in, the BFG's anti-war salvos are nowhere to be found. A little too slow for younger children (even though there are some excellent fart gags involving the Queen and her corgis) and too superficial for older ones, *The BFG* seems to be conversing with nobody about nothing. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Steven Spielberg  
Frank Marshall  
Sam Mercer  
**Screenplay**  
Melissa Mathison  
Based on the book  
by Roald Dahl  
**Director of Photography**  
Janusz Kaminski  
**Edited by**  
Michael Kahn  
**Production Designers**  
Rick Carter  
Robert Stromberg  
**Music**  
John Williams  
**Supervising Sound Designer**  
Gary Rydstrom  
**Costume Designer**  
Joanna Johnston  
**Stunt Co-ordinator**  
Marny Eng  
**Senior Animation Supervisor**  
Jamie Beard  
**Visual Effects & Animation Created by**  
Weta Digital Limited

@Storyteller  
Distribution Co., LLC,  
Disney Enterprises,  
Inc. and Walden Media  
**Production Companies**  
Amblin Entertainment  
and Reliance  
Entertainment  
present in association  
with Walden Media  
A Kennedy/Marshall  
production  
A Steven  
Spielberg film  
**Executive Producers**  
Kathleen Kennedy  
John Madden  
Kristie Macosko  
Krieger  
Michael Siegel

**Cast**  
Mark Rylance  
BFG  
Ruby Barnhill  
Sophie  
Penelope Wilton  
the Queen  
Jemaine Clement  
Fleishlumpeater  
Rebecca Hall  
Mary

**Rafe Spall**  
Mr Tibbs  
**Bill Hader**  
Bloodbottler  
**Olafur Darri Olafsson**  
Maidmasher/cook  
**Adam Godley**  
Manhugger/lout 1  
**Michael David Adamthwaite**  
butcher boy/  
Danish driver  
**Daniel Bacon**  
Bonecruncher/lout 2  
**Jonathan Holmes**  
Childchewer/  
pub landlord  
**Chris Gibbs**  
Gizzardgulper/  
late night walker  
**Paul Moniz de Sá**  
Meatdripper/lout 3

**Dolby Atmos**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

Some screenings  
presented in 3D

**Distributor**  
E! Films

London, the late 20th century. One night, wandering around the orphanage where she lives, Sophie sees a giant. The giant realises that she's seen him, and takes her back to his cottage in giant land. He begins cooking a meal, and Sophie assumes she will be eaten. Her attempt to escape is unsuccessful. The giant explains that he eats only vegetables, but that she will be eaten if she goes outside. He gives her a dream about being caught and eaten by the other giants. He tells her his name: the BFG (Big Friendly Giant), bestowed on him by a young boy long ago. They try to go out to find dreams, but the other giants bully the BFG until it begins raining. The BFG and Sophie catch dreams and nightmares. The BFG learns that Sophie dropped her blanket in giant land; he returns her to the orphanage for her safety. She tests the BFG by jumping off a ledge; he catches her and takes her back to his house. The other giants ransack the BFG's house, looking for Sophie, but the BFG fights them off. Sophie and the BFG decide to make a dream for the Queen that will scare her into helping them get rid of the other giants. They give the dream to the Queen, and she is convinced. The BFG creates a dream for the other giants that will make them regret eating children, and the military transports them to an island where they can eat only vegetables. Sophie lives in the palace with the Queen's assistants; the BFG begins writing a book about their adventures.



## Born to Be Blue

Canada/United Kingdom/Germany 2015  
Director: Robert Budreau

See Feature  
on page 36

### Reviewed by Sam Davies

Early on in *Born to Be Blue*, Robert Budreau's extended riff on the troubled life and career of Chet Baker, the action is abruptly and promisingly reframed. Baker is backstage after his set, fooling around with a groupie, both nodding out on heroin, when his girlfriend bursts in and a furious argument erupts. Then comes the clapper – and we realise we're watching a movie being made in 1966, with Ethan Hawke playing Chet Baker. It's a moment of relief, in which the slightly hammy acting and clichéd set-ups are seemingly acknowledged, as if Budreau is symbolically crumpling up biopic conventions and throwing them in the bin.

The problem is that he then proceeds to fish them out again and smooth them into the rest of film. *Born to Be Blue* has ample raw material in retracing Baker's maudlin arc from the pin-up boy of West Coast cool to the twilight years of addiction and drift, and Budreau, as writer and director, largely contents himself with hitting the predictable notes in the story. Baker is a charismatic mess; old friends despair; can he stay off the dope and pull off one last comeback? Can the love of a good woman save him? It's formally much less ambitious than Don Cheadle's *Miles Ahead*, though the two films overlap in more than just their release schedules: both examine the lives of famous trumpet players from the viewpoint of mid-career doldrums, both invent composite characters to supply a narrative need (a rock writer, a girlfriend). Miles himself makes a fleeting appearance as a character here, watching a Baker set early on with curled lip, before reappearing in the last reel in the same role as judge and jazz gatekeeper.

As Baker, Hawke does succeed in one difficult balancing act, managing to conjure, sometimes simultaneously, both the choirboy charm of Baker's youth and also the gaunt, damaged leer of his later years. There's also an interlude in



Lip service: Ethan Hawke

which *Born to Be Blue* steps out of its more obvious scenery (the nightclub interiors, the studio, the Pacific coastline) as Baker takes new lover Jane to meet his parents in Oklahoma. Baker skulks across a prairie farmyard, loafs on his childhood bed and plays trumpet in the barn, the prodigal son returned. It's incongruous, and a break from the much referenced image of Baker as a crooner in the wee small hours (Matt Damon's Tom Ripley impersonating Baker singing 'My Funny Valentine' to take just one allusion).

But the drama in *Born to Be Blue* plays out too much on the surface: a well-lit terrain in which cause and effect are visible, desires and directions clear. The biopic-within-a-biopic conceit briefly suggests a film that will weave the addict's rehearsals, evasions and delusions into its own fabric, but Budreau defaults to a safer option. If Bruce Weber's take on Chet Baker in *Let's Get Lost* (1988) – a drifting tone poem on the half-life of the addict as much as a documentary – is a reference point at all for Budreau, it's only as an approach he wants to avoid. **S**

## Brahman Naman

Director: Q

### Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Premiering simultaneously in numerous countries via online streaming service Netflix, thereby taking advantage of a far laxer censorship regime than would have been the case had the film been made primarily for theatrical release in India, *Brahman Naman* isn't any more sexually graphic than the not dissimilar *Porky's* (1981) or *American Pie* (1999). However, in an Indian cultural context it's sometimes genuinely startling, especially when protagonist Naman (Shashank Arora) repurposes various domestic items – a fridge, a ceiling fan, a fish tank complete with confounded occupants – as elaborate masturbation aids, while concocting extravagant fantasies about female classmates and neighbours. Naturally, he and his friends Ajay, Ramu and Randeep (aka Randy) are reluctant virgins.

Much of the story (scripted by film critic and *S&S* contributor Naman Ramachandran) is familiar stuff, at least structurally. The central foursome are members of a notably successful Bangalore university quiz team, generally spending their winnings on vast quantities of alcohol. Invited to a final in Calcutta, they meet an all-female team from Madras en route, but fail to progress beyond social pleasantries; returning home, Naman learns sobering moral lessons that make the film closer to the downbeat likes of *The Last American Virgin* (1982). It's set in the 1980s, occasionally interrupted by animated interludes that appear sourced from worn analogue videotape, and much fun is had with colourful period detail along the way, including a possibly imaginary advertisement for a rubber mattress manufactured by Naman's father ("The mattress of copulation to the nation's population.")

But it's the specifically Indian elements that give the film its distinction, especially the way in which the caste system becomes an additional complicating factor in establishing someone's suitability as a potential partner. Naman is a high-caste Brahman from a socially conservative background (the scenes with his father sketch the basics for the uninitiated), and he initially treats sometime quiz partner Ash (Sindhu Sreenivasa Murthy) with a casual dismissiveness that borders on the misogynistic, until she reveals that she's a Brahman too. For similar reasons, Naman refuses to talk to the lower-caste Rita (Subholina Sen) face to face, though he lusts after her from a discreet distance. He has no cultural qualms about rival quiz team leader Naina (Anula Shirish Navlekar), but she intellectually outclasses him from the start, anticipating and undermining every one of his would-be chat-up lines.

Director 'Q' (aka Qaushiq Mukherjee) keeps things consistently brisk and

REVIEWS

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Producers

Jennifer Jonas  
Leonard Farlinger  
Robert Budreau

Jake Seal

#### Written by

Robert Budreau

#### Director of

Photography

Steve Cosens

#### Editor

David Freeman

#### Production Designer

Aidan Leroux

#### Original Score and

Jazz Arrangements

David Braid

#### Original Score

Todor Kobakov

Steve London

#### Sound Recordist

Robert Fletcher

#### Costume Designer

Anne Dixon

#### ©BTB Blue

Productions Ltd and

BTBB Productions

SPV Limited.

#### Production

Companies

Produced with the

participation of

#### Telefilm Canada

Entertainment

One presents in

association with K5

International a New

Real Films, Humanity,

Black Hangar

Studios production

Produced in

association with

Productivity

Media and

Entertainment One

Produced with the

participation of

Northern Ontario

Heritage Fund

Corporation, Ontario

Media Development

Corporation

Produced in

association with

The Movie Network,

Movie Central

#### Executive Producers

William G. Santor

John Hills

Andrew Chang-Sang

Adam Moryto

Gurpreet Chandoke

Stefan Jacobs

Terry Bird

Mark Slone

#### Patrick Roy

Christina Kubacki

#### Cast

Ethan Hawke

Chet Baker

Carmen Ejogo

Jane Azuka, 'Elaine'

Callum Keith Rennie

Dick Bock

Stephen McHattie

Chesney Baker Sr

Tony Nappo

Officer Reid

Dan Lett

Danny Friedman

Janet-Laine Green

Vera Baker

Janine Theriault

Florence

Kedar Brown

Miles Davis

Kevin Hanchard

Dizzy Gillespie

#### In Colour and

Black & White

[1.85:1]

#### Distributor

UPHE Content Group

California, 1966. Trumpeter and vocalist Chet Baker is playing himself in a film based on his own life. Between takes, Baker attempts to seduce Jane, his onscreen girlfriend. They go on a date, but Baker is confronted by a dealer chasing a debt. He's badly beaten and the injuries to his mouth threaten his ability to play trumpet. The film is cancelled and Dick, Baker's manager and producer, gives up on him at last.

Jane helps Baker to recover and they move in together. She neglects her acting career so that Baker can rebuild his trumpet technique and stay on his prescribed methadone. Baker plays low-key sets at a nearby restaurant and tries to keep his parole officer happy. A visit to his parents' home in Oklahoma – and his father's disapproval – gives Baker the motivation to keep playing. He also proposes to the now pregnant Jane.

Back in California, Baker convinces Dick to give him low-paid session work and eventually an informal gig to showcase his recovery to influential promoters. He performs well and talks Dizzy Gillespie into giving him a set at Birdland in New York. To Baker's anger, Jane has an audition that clashes with the Birdland comeback. He goes alone and, overcome by stage fright, shoots up before performing. Jane arrives in time to witness the set, but Baker makes clear that he has chosen heroin over her.



Virgin territory: Dhanania, Arora, Varad



lively, making inventive use of an uncharacteristically wide framing for a comedy of this ilk, while the quiz team's love of trivia provides numerous excuses to quote Shakespeare, pronounce 'flocinaucinihilipilification' or concoct westernised one-liners about local cultural matters ("They look one drop-kick away from an arranged marriage"). Nothing in *Brahman Naman* is quite as memorable as the high points of the other films mentioned above (though the masturbation scenes come close), but it finds a nifty equivalent of *American Pie*'s scene-stealing Eugene Levy in Bernie (Denzil Smith), a supposedly responsible adult chaperone whose prodigious thirst turns out to outclass that of any of his charges. 🍷

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Directed by</b> Q [i.e. Qaushiq Mukherjee]	Riley Productions presents in association with Corniche Pictures an Oddjoint production	<b>Navlekar</b> Naina
<b>Producers</b> Steve Barron Celine Loop	<b>Executive Producers</b> Hani Farsi John Herbert S. Ramachandran	<b>Sid Mallya</b> Ronnie
<b>Screenplay</b> Naman Ramachandran	<b>Camera</b> Siddhartha Nuni Q	<b>Denzil Smith</b> Bernie
<b>Editor</b> Manas Mittal	<b>Cast</b> <b>Shashank Arora</b> Naman	<b>Biswa Kalyan Rath</b> Ilash
<b>Production Designer</b> Tabasheer Zutshi	<b>Tanmay Dhanania</b> Ajay	<b>Shataf Figar</b> Brian D'Costa
<b>Music</b> Neel Adhikari Miti Adhikari	<b>Chaitanya Varad</b> Ramu	<b>Kartik Iyer</b> Henry
<b>Sound Designer</b> Tarun Bhandari	<b>Vaishwath Shankar</b> Randy	<b>Anisa Butt</b> Anita
<b>Costume Designer</b> Ritarupa Bhattacharjee	<b>Sindhu Sreenivasa</b> Murthy	<b>Amrushi</b> Palchaudhuri
<b>Production Companies</b>	<b>Ash</b> Subholina Sen	<b>Disha</b> Raychaudhuri
	<b>Anula Shirish</b>	<b>Rani</b> Tanaya Saigal
		<b>Yasmin</b>
	<b>In Colour</b>	
	<b>Distributor</b> Netflix Originals	

Bangalore, the 1980s. When Naman, Ajay and Ramu win the South India Inter-University Quiz Competition, they are invited to the All-India equivalent in Calcutta. Spurning lone female teammate Ash, they poach Randeep (aka Randy) from the runner-up team. They are largely ignorant of sex, and this ignorance is complicated by a caste system which decrees that many young women (including local beauty Rita and, they assume, Ash) to be off limits. When class jock Ronnie challenges them to a drinking competition at his party, Naman and Ajay take sexually compromising photographs of their comatose host and circulate them to their female classmates. Accompanying their worldlier friend Henry to a brothel, Naman and Ajay flee in horror. Ramu's father forbids him from going to Calcutta, but the other three catch the train in the company of Bernie, their official chaperone. Meeting the all-female Madras Mandarins team en route, they find themselves intellectually outclassed, though Naman strikes up a rapport with Naina, his fellow team captain. At the quiz, the Calcutta Sloane Rangers win after a tie-break. Naina tells Naman that they are not in a relationship. Back home, Naman becomes closer to Ash, who reveals that she is a fellow Brahman, but they fall out after she discovers his plan to substitute the equally virginal Ajay for himself when making love in Naman's father's rubber mattress factory. Reports of drinking in Calcutta lead to the team being banned from future contests. Randy and Ash strike up a relationship. Naman, Ajay and Ramu sing 'Alabama Song'.

## The Carer

Hungary/United Kingdom 2016  
Director: János Edelényi

### Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Like Gloria Swanson when she played Norma Desmond in *Sunset Blvd* (1950), Brian Cox is here confronted with real images of his younger self – though the ageing legend he portrays has none of Norma's delusions of enduring youth or imminent comeback. Sir Michael Gifford may have a high regard for his own talent, but he believes that he and the world have firmly left each other behind as Parkinson's has robbed him of his independence. "Have they run out of pygmies? TV stars? Second-raters?" he barks, when told he's being honoured with a lifetime achievement award. It takes a warm but combative new friendship with young Hungarian carer Dorottya to renew his enthusiasm for life.

Sentimental cliché inevitably threatens tales of mentorship and inspiration across the generations, and the effort involved in avoiding it is palpable here – but also largely successful. If the self-possessed and unpatronisable Dorottya (Coco König) comes across more like a composite attempt to confound expectations of young female characters than a real human being, her interaction with Cox's salty old narcissist is consistently sharp and fun. The last script to be originated by the late Gilbert Adair not only contains some smart volleys between the two, and solo zingers for Cox, but also boasts a sneaky self-awareness when it comes to the more hackneyed elements of feelgood stories. When Dorottya comments that a pub landlord is nice, Sir Michael notes, "He's a pub landlord – they're written that way." 🍷

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> József Berger Steve Bowden Charlotte Wontner	Entertainment, The Movies Begin, Mythberg Films, Hopscotch Films, Vita Nova Films present	Mythberg Films, Hopscotch Films
<b>Written by</b> Gilbert Adair János Edelényi Tom Kinninmont	Developed with the financial support of the MEDIA Programme of the European Union, Révai Digitalis Kiadó, Hungarian National Film Fund, Mythberg Films, FilmJus	<b>Executive Producers</b> Simon Lewis Felix Gill Judith Csernai John Archer Brian Cox
<b>Director of Photography</b> Tibor Máthé	Financed/supported by Hungarian National Film Fund, Ballade Investments Inc., Hungarian Film Incentive, Senseshot Productions, Simon Lewis, Goldfinch Entertainment, The Movies Begin, Mythberg Films, Screen South, Sparks Camera & Lighting Ltd, Northstar Ventures, The Maidstone Studios, Northern Film + Media	<b>Cast</b> <b>Brian Cox</b> Sir Michael Gifford <b>Emilia Fox</b> Sophia <b>Anna Chancellor</b> Milly <b>Karl Johnson</b> Joseph <b>Coco König</b> Dorottya
<b>Editor</b> Adam Recht		<b>In Colour</b> [1.85:1]
<b>Production Designer</b> Janice Flint		<b>Distributor</b> Cinefile World
<b>Original Music Composed by</b> Atti Pacsay		Hungarian theatrical title <b>Jutalomjáték</b>
<b>Sound</b> Tamás Zányi		
<b>Costume Designer</b> Sarah Tapscott		
©Mythberg Films Kft, The Carer Film Ltd		
<b>Production Companies</b> Hungarian National Film Fund, Ballade Investments, Senseshot Productions, Hungarian Film Incentive, Goldfinch		

Kent, the present. Aspiring actress Dorottya is taken on as carer for retired stage legend Sir Michael Gifford. After initial resistance, she gets along well with him but clashes with his daughter Sophia. When Dorottya takes Sir Michael to the local pub, Sophia fires her. Furious, Sir Michael collapses and is taken to hospital. Dorottya goes to see him. Later, she accompanies him to an awards ceremony, where he is honoured for his lifetime's achievement.

## Central Intelligence

USA 2016  
Director: Rawson Marshall Thurber  
Certificate 12A 107m 32s

### Reviewed by Leigh Singer

"Saving the World Takes a Little Hart and a Big Johnson" runs the cheeky tagline for this good-natured action comedy, and it's not just a sly marketing *double entendre* but the film's mantra, playing on the sight gag of the most physically mismatched co-stars since *Twins*' Arnold Schwarzenegger and Danny DeVito and yet at the same time announcing their relative value. Diminutive Kevin Hart's trademark motormouth antics are, for once, effectively the straight-man underpinning (a boon if you're not a fan of his high-pitched improv style) that allows Dwayne Johnson's supersized physicality and big-hearted humour to utterly dominate proceedings, to everyone's benefit.

Johnson, given his WWF credentials as 'the Rock', has long been the heir apparent to traditional, bulked-up action heroes of the 80s – one might recall his brief meta-mantle-passing moment in 2003's *The Rundown*, entering a club as Arnie leaves and advises him to "have fun". But early on it was clear that, alongside his impressive physical endowment, Johnson had a natural, self-deprecating charm and comic timing lacking in Schwarzenegger and Stallone, along with a willingness to subvert testosterone-fuelled excess. One can readily picture Johnson as the Terminator or John Rambo; but could anyone realistically envisage either Arnie or Sly pulling off *Be Cool*'s flamboyantly gay bodyguard? *Central Intelligence*'s smartest move, then, is in allowing Johnson to embrace both his uber-machismo and more feminine side. Deadly CIA agent Bob Stone – transformed from chubby, bullied high-schooler Robbie Weirich – and his love of unicorns, *Sixteen Candles* and fanny packs gets plenty of laughs; but Johnson's wide-eyed sincerity ensures that the joke is never on him, nor the inclusive, expansive depiction of masculinity he represents. It's far more comfortable ribbing Weirich/Stone's one-time school saviour, Hart's Calvin "Golden Jet" Joyner, the star student whose adult aspirations never took off, with witty, tossed-off one-liners calling him "a snack-sized Denzel" or "a black Will Smith". This benignly playful banter does come at a cost, though. Stone's oppressive need to latch on to and then steamroller his former high-school saviour has a potentially sinister and darker comic hue – witness, for example, 1996's Jim Carrey vehicle *The Cable Guy* – which the film, hurrying to establish a new buddy-movie franchise, blithely overlooks.

As *Central Intelligence* barrels on with its bizarrely contrived, overstuffed macguffin of a plot, it inadvertently proves movie-comedy's golden rule: if the performers have chemistry and



Be my baby: Kevin Hart, Dwayne Johnson



## Chevalier

Director: Athina Rachel Tsangari  
Certificate 18 105m 6s

the gag hit-rate remains high, sloppy storytelling and filmmaking largely get a pass. Director Rawson Marshall Thurber (*Dodgeball, We're the Millers*) exhibits scant flair for either action set pieces or visual comic staging, and the baggy editing rarely generates additional tension or humour. And it's a shame that the script by Thurber, Ike Barinholtz and David Stassen finds so little to do for actors of the calibre of Amy Ryan, Aaron Paul and Thomas Kretschmann. Yet by allowing Johnson free rein, then throwing in a couple of enjoyable unbilled star cameos and a credits gag reel, *Central Intelligence* allows its true colours to come out. The climactic high-school prom reunion is a nostalgia-driven pageant that honours traditional, reassuring values – while being self-aware enough to celebrate a more progressive kind of homecoming king. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Scott Stuber Peter Principato Paul Young Michael Fottrell	©Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc., Universal Pictures and RatPac-Dune Entertainment LLC (US and Canada)	Ed Helms
<b>Screenplay</b> Ike Barinholtz David Stassen Rawson Marshall Thurber	©Universal Pictures, Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. and RatPac-Dune Entertainment LLC (all other territories)	<b>Cast</b> <b>Dwayne Johnson</b> Bob Stone <b>Kevin Hart</b> Calvin Joyner <b>Amy Ryan</b> Agent Pamela Harris <b>Aaron Paul</b> Phil <b>Danielle Nicolet</b> Maggie <b>Jason Bateman</b> Trevor <b>Aaron Paul</b> Phil <b>Ryan Hansen</b> Steve <b>Tim Griffin</b> Agent Stan Mitchell <b>Timothy John Smith</b> Agent Nick Cooper
<b>Story</b> Ike Barinholtz David Stassen	<b>Production Companies</b> New Line Cinema and Universal Pictures present in association with Ratpac-Dune Entertainment, Perfect World Pictures a Bluegrass Films/Principato- Young Entertainment production A Rawson Marshall Thurber film	<b>Dolby Digital</b> In Colour [2.35:1]
<b>Director of Photography</b> Barry Peterson	<b>Executive Producers</b> Toby Emmerich Richard Brenner Samuel J. Brown Michael Disco Steven Mnuchin	<b>Distributor</b> Universal Pictures International UK & Eire
<b>Edited by</b> Mike Sale Brian Olds		
<b>Production Designer</b> Stephen Lineweaver		
<b>Music</b> Theodore Shapiro Ludwig Göransson		
<b>Sound Mixer</b> Tom Williams		
<b>Costumes</b> Designed by Carol Ramsey		
<b>Supervising Stunt Co-ordinator</b> Allan Poppleton		

**Boston, 1996.** At their high-school graduation, star student Calvin Joyner rescues overweight classmate Robbie Weiricht from public humiliation by bullies.

**Present day.** Calvin is married to school sweetheart Maggie; he is working as an accountant but is frustrated that he has not realised his full potential. On the eve of a school reunion, Calvin is contacted through Facebook by one Bob Stone, revealed to be a rejuvenated Robbie. During a night out, Bob employs his impressive combat moves on local thugs and persuades Calvin to use his accounting skills to help him with supposed computer-banking problems. The next day, CIA operatives arrive at Calvin's home and tell him that Bob is in fact a rogue agent trying to sell satellite codes to an arms dealer known as the Black Badger. The CIA tracks Bob to Calvin's workplace; Bob escapes with Calvin, embroiling him in his plans to reveal the Badger's identity. Bob evades the CIA by posing as Calvin and Maggie's marriage counsellor. Later, Bob is captured but Calvin frees him. The pair rendezvous with the Badger, revealed to be Bob's former partner Phil, who faked his own death. Bob and Calvin retrieve the codes and clear their names.

At the school reunion, Bob takes revenge on his teenage nemesis and reconnects with the girl he had a crush on. Calvin starts work with Bob at the CIA.



Size matters: Yorgos Pirpassopoulos, Makis Papadimitriou

See Feature  
on page 32

### Reviewed by Erika Balsom

Petty, narcissistic, vain, manipulative: certain adjectives tend to be attached to women much more frequently than to men, a sure symptom

of a misogyny as pervasive as it is under-acknowledged. And yet all might apply to the men of Athina Rachel Tsangari's brilliant *Chevalier*, a film about six friends on an octopus-fishing trip aboard a luxury yacht in the Aegean who compete to determine which among them is "the best in general". Whether out of boredom, malice or some combination of the two, they gamify their holiday so as to both formalise and justify the selfish competitiveness that infuses their interactions, while the servants look on and discuss the proceedings. With a deadpan tenor and steely palette, Tsangari pivots away from the well-trodden territory of mean girls to cast her gaze instead on these mean boys. The result? Like Claire Denis's otherwise very different *Beau travail* (1999), in its interrogation of masculinity and homosocial relationships, *Chevalier* emerges as that fascinating and seemingly paradoxical thing: a feminist film in which women are virtually absent from the screen.

Like the girl gangs of countless films, each man in *Chevalier* occupies a delineated position in the social landscape. The Doctor delights in his patriarchal authority, lording it over his son-in-law Yannis and younger colleague Christos, both of whom have romantic entanglements with his daughter Anna. Long-haired Joseph is generally insouciant, seeming to care little about any aspect of the game other than the size of his erection, while his business partner Yorgos is the classical unmarked protagonist, the Carrie of the group in *Sex and the City* terms. The corpulent, somewhat infantile Dimitris, a lip-synching rock collector who lives with his mother, fulfils the requisite role of pitied outcast. Though occasionally the men participate in 'mini-challenges', to use the language of reality television, a key premise of

*Chevalier* is that there is no outside to the game. Absolutely every interaction and habit can be subject to scrutiny. The men examine their sagging stomachs, unflaggingly monitor each other's behaviour and purposefully undermine the self-confidence of their supposed friends. Judgements are never delivered directly but implied through passive-aggressive remarks and privately recorded in tiny notebooks.

Despite *Chevalier*'s clear concern with gender, its skewering of masculinity is perhaps less important than its broader social satire. Beyond its interest in dick measuring as both metaphor and literal activity, the film uses the limited setting of the yacht to stage a dark, absurdist send-up of the pathologies of 21st-century selfhood. Though frequently hilarious, *Chevalier*'s vision of a quantified life of incessant surveillance and punishing self-improvement leaves little to laugh about. Like last year's *The Lobster* (with which it shares a co-writer, Efthymis Filippou), *Chevalier* proposes a scathing indictment of contemporary life through a highly contrived, claustrophobic situation. As Hitchcock recognised in *Lifeboat* (1944), the ship is a space apart, one with close historical ties to the development of capitalism, and possessing a special allegorical power to expose how life is governed at large. Whereas *The Lobster* pointed to the deep ambivalence of the monogamous couple as a basic societal unit, *Chevalier* targets neoliberalism's demand for omniscience, its obsession with metrics and its spurious injunction that we must not just tolerate capital's complete subsumption of life but find it enjoyable and fun, like a game.

Yorgos is awarded the prize of a signet ring following a rehearsed speech in which he declares that he feels he has already won. When one's personality is but a product on the market of individualism, such a self-validating proclamation is perhaps the most winning gesture of all. But much earlier, Joseph had both predicted and deflated this ending, telling Yorgos,





“You’ll win, but you won’t actually win anything. Even if you win, it doesn’t mean you’re the best in general.” Indeed, to name the winner is no kind of spoiler, a fact that Tsangari underlines in a masterful final sequence. Faces remain out of frame when the ring is awarded, and little attention is given to revealing the identity of the Chevalier in the darkness of the pier. Blink and miss it. This strategic lack of emphasis makes way for the film’s true culmination: the servants have initiated their own game of Chevalier. Solidifying the film’s allegorical dimension, this concluding scene foregrounds the question of class within a narrative dominated by conspicuous affluence. Here, too, *Chevalier*’s suggestion is damning: the working classes reproduce the behaviours of the privileged, even when such attitudes are toxic and undoubtedly against their own interests. Perhaps fishing for octopus would have been a better idea. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Producers</b> Maria Hatzakou Athina Rachel Tsangari <b>Written by</b> Efthymis Filippou Athina Rachel Tsangari <b>Director of Photography</b> Christos Karamanis <b>Film Editing</b> Matt Johnson Yorgos Mavropsaridis <b>Production Designer</b> Anna Georgiadou <b>Music</b> Marilena Orfanou <b>Production Sound Mixer/</b> <b>Sound Designer</b> Leandros Ntounis <b>Costume Design</b> Vassila Rozana <b>Production Companies</b> Faliro House Production	presents a Faliro House & Haos Film production in co-production with Nova & The Match Factory with the support of The Greek Film Center <b>Executive Producer</b> Christos V. Konstantakopoulos <b>Cast</b> Yorgos Kendros doctor Panos Koronis Yorgos Vangelis Mourikis Joseph Nikolaou Makis Papadimitriou Dimitris Yorgos Pirpassopoulos Yannis Sakis Rouvas Christos Yannis Drakopoulos cabin boy	<b>Nikos Orfanos</b> captain <b>Kostas Filippoglou</b> cook <b>Nikolaos Mardakis</b> engineer <b>Ioannis Brigkos</b> <b>Nektarios Foteinatos</b> boatswains <b>Dolby Digital</b> <b>In Colour</b> [2.35:1] Subtitles <b>Distributor</b> Studiocanal Limited
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The Aegean, present day. Six middle-aged men take a yacht trip. Not content with fishing for octopus, they decide to play a game called ‘Chevalier’, devoted to determining which among them is “the best in general”. Notepads and pencils in hand, they assess each other’s every word and gesture: how they make a sea-urchin salad, how fast they assemble an Ikea bookshelf, their cholesterol levels and the size of their erections. Meanwhile the boat’s servants look on, debating each man’s strengths, weaknesses and rank within the group. As further details are revealed about the personal and professional relationships between the six men, the game intensifies. The boat arrives in Athens, but the men lie to their wives, saying that their return has been delayed, in order to stay on board and continue the game. The competitive atmosphere takes its toll on the participants, and longstanding tensions rise to the surface. Yorgos proclaims that he feels he has won already, regardless of the final vote, and proposes that they all become blood brothers. Christos objects, claiming that Yorgos is trying to influence the vote, and only Dimitris agrees to the blood-mingling ritual.

The film concludes with Yorgos winning the prize, a signet ring. As the men leave the boat, the servants are playing their own game of Chevalier in the kitchen.

## The Commune

Denmark/Sweden/The Netherlands/Norway 2015  
 Director: Thomas Vinterberg  
 Certificate 15 111m 49s

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

In the subgenre of the cautionary-celebratory, weary-wise commune movie, in which shaking off conventional hang-ups resolutely fails to create a heaven on earth, the Scandinavians have recorded most of the better-known films. (The ideal of cooperative group living is somewhat less cherished in the Anglosphere, where the attitude might be summed up by ex-Fourierist Tom Townsend in Whit Stillman’s 1990 *Metropolitan*: “I wouldn’t want to live on a farm with a bunch of other people.”) Notable Nordic examples include Lukas Moodysson’s *Together* (2000) and Lars von Trier’s *The Idiots* (1998), and lo and behold Thomas Vinterberg’s *The Commune* bears the mark of the Zentropa company, co-founded by von Trier, Vinterberg’s primary one-time comrade-in-arms in the Dogme 95 manifesto/gambit/stunt, the brief existence of which attests to the tenacity of communal action in the Danish mind.

The 1970s commune in which Vinterberg’s film takes place has no very high-flown ideals that we are privy to – the house rules involve a shared beer fund and regular kitchen-table meetings over meals prepared according to a predetermined schedule. Vinterberg himself was, from the age of seven, raised in surroundings similar to those depicted – these are working urban professionals, not back-to-nature agrarian utopians. The central couple are a professor and a newscaster, Erik and Anna, played by Ulrich Thomsen and Trine Dyrholm, both veterans of previous Vinterberg productions, including his international breakthrough *Festen* (aka *The Celebration*, 1998). Erik and Anna are both seemingly in their forties, though their careers are on different trajectories – he’s a professor of ‘rational architecture’ finally on the brink of breaking out into actual commissions; she’s a female TV anchor at the

age that makes the station higher-ups start to look elsewhere. What would be a touchy time for the couple regardless is exacerbated when they enter into a living arrangement that seems to hasten the breakdown of the family unit by diminishing its centrality, dissolving it within the commune. It takes a village.

Vinterberg’s best claim to a place in film history is in his display of the cinematographic possibilities of flexible, skittering, insinuating new digital cameras in *Festen*. He is less inclined towards swashbuckling these days, and *The Commune* is mostly dedicated to trying to register the ultrasonic tremors of its star performances with handheld fumbling. Despite the commune setting and ensemble cast, Vinterberg rarely loses focus on the dissolution of Erik and Anna’s marriage, and particularly on the small blows to Anna’s increasingly beleaguered psyche – the way she side-eyes her young and beautiful makeup girl at the TV station, the dozen little warning signs that lead to breakdown histrionics and festival prizes.

Dyrholm is as good as one can be when mired in mediocrity – Vinterberg’s movie is a conventional and low-stakes work, done in the familiar naturalistic style that crosses borders like the euro – matter-of-fact with sex, earnest, devoid of comedy and full of drippy period soundtrack cues that aim to half-nelson the viewer into feeling something. Compare it to such recent studies in communal system breakdown as Nathan Silver’s New Jersey-set rehab psychodrama *Stinking Heaven* (2015) or Amanda Rose Wilder’s *Approaching the Elephant* (2014), a documentary about the struggle for the soul of the Teddy McArdle Free School, and it disappears – a mid-70s nostalgia piece that can’t get a grip on the memory. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Producers</b> Sisse Graum Jørgensen Morten Kaufmann <b>Screenplay</b> Thomas Vinterberg Tobias Lindholm Based on the play <i>Kollektivet</i> by Thomas Vinterberg, Mogens Rukov <b>Director of Photography</b> Jesper Tøffner <b>Editors</b> Anne Østerud Janus Billeskov Jansen <b>Production Designer</b> Niels Sejer <b>Composer</b>	<b>Fins Merkiès</b> <b>Sound Designers</b> Anne Jensen Kristian Selin Eides Andersen <b>Costume Designer</b> Ellen Lens ©Zentropa Entertainments19 ApS, Zentropa International Sweden AB, Topkapi Films B.V., Zentropa International Netherlands B.V. <b>Production Companies</b> Zentropa Entertainments19 present	in co-operation with Toolbox Film in co-production with Film Väst, Zentropa International Sweden, Topkapi Films, Zentropa International Netherlands with support from Det Danske Filminstitut, DR, Eurimages, Nordisk Film & TV Fond, The Netherlands Film Fund, Svenska Filminstitutet, SVT A production of Zentropa Entertainment in co-operation	with Toolbox Film, Film Väst, Zentropa International Sweden, Topkapi Films Zentropa International Netherlands With the support of the MEDIA Programme of the European Union <b>Executive Producer</b> Marie Gade <b>Cast</b> Trine Dyrholm Anna Ulrich Thomsen Erik Helene Reingaard	<b>Neumann</b> Emma <b>Martha Sofie Wallström Hansen</b> Freja <b>Lars Ranthe</b> Ole <b>Fares Fares</b> Allon <b>Magnus Millang</b> Steffen <b>Anne Gry Henningsen</b> Ditte <b>Julie Agnete Vang</b> Mona <b>Sebastian Grønnegaard Milbrat</b> Vilads <b>Dolby Digital</b>	<b>In Colour</b> [2.35:1] Subtitles <b>Distributor</b> Curzon Artificial Eye Danish theatrical title <i>Kollektivet</i>
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Copenhagen, the mid-1970s. Erik, a teacher of ‘rational architecture’, inherits the large manor house that belonged to his father. He wants to sell, given the cost of keeping up the property, but his wife Anna, a newscaster, and their teenage daughter Freja want to stay. Anna convinces Erik to offset the cost by inviting friends to live with them and turning the place into a commune. They begin by inviting Ole, who is followed by emotionally brittle Allon and others, including a couple whose child has a heart condition which will kill him before his ninth birthday. The experiment is at first a success, and the commune members bond through

kitchen-table meetings and skinny-dipping. However, tensions arise when Erik begins an affair with one of his students, Emma, and is found out by Freja. Erik moves out, but returns to the house at Anna’s behest, bringing Emma with him. Though Anna attempts to build a friendship with the sympathetic Emma, she becomes increasingly unstable, and loses her job. The situation reaches breaking point at a dinner meeting, when Freja advises her mother to leave the commune. Anna resolves to do so, and her departure is followed closely by the death of the doomed boy; the group scatter his ashes from the pier where they once skinny-dipped.

## The Conjuring 2

USA 2016  
Director: James Wan  
Certificate 15 133m 41s

### Reviewed by Adam Nayman

Not since the sisters of Nonnberg Abbey tried to solve a problem like Maria has a nun caused as much trouble as the habit-clad phantom in *The Conjuring* (2013). Appearing first in a flashback as paranormal investigator Lorraine Warren (Vera Farmiga) probes the aftermath of the Amityville Horror, the demonic novice keeps popping up in James Wan's London-set and (very) loosely fact-based thriller about a family grappling with a poltergeist in their council house.

Like its predecessor, *The Conjuring 2* makes claims to veracity, using the adventures of Lorraine and her husband Ed (Patrick Wilson) – whose real-world equivalents were among the most famous ghost-hunters of the 1970s – in a very clever way indeed: as the Warrens are confronted by all manner of sceptical citizens and professional debunkers, their dogged insistence on the existence of the spirit world doubles as a statement of purpose for their director's all-in approach to the supernatural. There's no ambiguity in *The Conjuring 2* – none of the 'is it or isn't it?' gamesmanship that William Friedkin employed at the start of *The Exorcist* (1973). The haunting comes early and often.

Wan is not an austere filmmaker; ever since that demonic clown popped out from behind the baby's crib in *Insidious* (2010), he's cultivated a spook-house aesthetic that swaps the gore of his debut *Saw* (2004) for more gleefully cheesy imagery. (Exhibit A: that damn nun, who gets a slow-burn set piece skulking through a shadowy living room – which is admittedly pretty memorable.) Wan's old-school approach is theoretically endearing but it's not necessarily that effective, especially not at 134 minutes: there's just not enough story here, true or otherwise, to fill out an epic running time, and while the actors playing the terrorised Hodgson family are good (especially Madison Wolfe as possessed pre-teen Janet and Frances O'Connor



The nun's story: Vera Farmiga

as her mother Peggy), Farmiga and Wilson's strangely stilted performances scuttle the ship (especially unfortunate given how much of the script is about their romantic and spiritual bond).

At times, *The Conjuring 2* is just plain sloppy: it's set in 1977 and yet uses The Clash's *London Calling* – released in 1979 – to herald a silly 'Hail, Britannia!' montage signalling the transatlantic shift in the story. This lack of conviction about the UK setting slightly undermines the script's sole interesting idea, which is to link little Janet's first waking encounter with the ghoul tormenting her to a television broadcast of Elizabeth II addressing a high-society gathering: the implication is that the Hodgsons, who can't even afford biscuits, are up against something scarier than the undead. That Wan doesn't ultimately do much with the sociological stuff isn't surprising, but the best horror movies root their clichés in something authentic. Despite ending with a slideshow that puts vintage photographs of the Warrens and Hodgsons alongside their onscreen avatars, *The Conjuring 2* is ersatz all the way. ☹

## Les Cowboys

France/Belgium 2015  
Director: Thomas Bidegain  
Certificate 12A 105m 4s

### Reviewed by Ginette Vincendeau

Beginning with a title that is as misleading as it is significant, *Les Cowboys* takes the spectator on a slow yet eventful journey through unexpected corners of France and notorious areas of the global geopolitical map. We are introduced to the family at the centre of the drama at a countryside rally where French people dress as cowboys, ride horses and sing 'Tennessee Rose'. The long sequence that opens the film, showing Alain (the excellent François Damiens) dancing and exchanging intense gazes with his teenage daughter Kelly (Iliana Zabeth) while his wife Nicole (Agathe Dronne) and their young son 'Kid' (Maxim Driesen) look on from the margins – prefigures the narrative to follow. Kelly's disappearance triggers Alain's obsessive and eventually self-destructive search, a quest in which Kid will play an important part but Nicole will be marginalised.

From French provincial middle-class family life the film plunges into global terrorism. In a now familiar story, shocked parents discover that their daughter has converted to Islam and followed Ahmed, a young Muslim (whose parents are equally appalled), possibly to the Middle East. The trajectory of Alain and the grown-up Kid (Finnegan Oldfield) in the years that follow Kelly's disappearance is rather pointedly underlined by television images of terrorist 'milestones'. Meanwhile there are false leads and meetings with mysterious Arabs in darkened rooms; these scenes do not altogether avoid cliché, though the film is careful to depict Ahmed's parents as moderate and enlightened. Kelly writes home occasionally but remains stubbornly absent.

The originality (and oddity) of *Les Cowboys* is to tell its story through a tribute to the American western. Kid starts the film as a fake cowboy, but becomes a real one when he takes over the search after his father dies in a car crash: in a series of gorgeous long takes, he rides on horseback across the majestic, dry Pakistan landscape, a modern-day Monument Valley, assisted by a mysterious 'American friend' (John C. Reilly).

*Les Cowboys* clearly echoes John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), in which John Wayne's hero, accompanied by his nephew, searches for the niece who has been abducted by Indians; when she is found, she has 'gone native'. Here the 'desert's prisoner' (as the French title for *The Searchers* goes) is split in two. Kid does not find Kelly in Pakistan but discovers Ahmed's new wife, the beautiful Shazhana (Ellora Torchia), whom he conveniently rescues after killing the 'evil



The vanishing: François Damiens

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Peter Safran  
Rob Cowan  
James Wan  
**Screenplay**  
Chad Hayes  
Carey W. Hayes  
James Wan  
David Leslie Johnson  
**Story**  
Chad Hayes  
Carey W. Hayes  
James Wan  
Based on characters created by Chad Hayes, Carey W. Hayes  
**Director of Photography**  
Don Burgess  
**Edited by**  
Kirk Morri  
**Production Designer**  
Julie Berghoff  
**Music**  
Joseph Bishara  
**Sound Mixer**  
William Kaplan  
**Costumes**  
Designed by  
Kristin M. Burke

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Entertainment Inc.  
and RatPac-Dune

Entertainment LLC  
**Production Companies**  
A New Line Cinema presentation  
In association with Ratpac-Dune Entertainment  
A Safran Company/  
Atomic Monster production  
A James Wan film  
**Executive Producers**  
Toby Emmerich  
Richard Brener  
Walter Hamada  
Dave Neustadter  
Steven Mnuchin

**Cast**  
**Vera Farmiga**  
Lorraine Warren  
**Patrick Wilson**  
Ed Warren  
**Frances O'Connor**  
Peggy Hodgson  
**Madison Wolfe**  
Janet Hodgson  
**Simon McBurney**  
Maurice Grosse  
**Franka Potente**  
Anita Gregory  
**Lauren Esposito**

Margaret Hodgson  
**Benjamin Haigh**  
Billy Hodgson  
**Patrick McAuley**  
Johnny Hodgson

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Warner Bros. Pictures  
International (UK)

**London, 1977. The Hodgson family begin experiencing strange events in their council house, with youngest daughter Janet complaining of a demonic presence. The visitations escalate to the point that objects begin flying around the room and other family members also see phantoms in the night.**

**In the US, paranormal investigators Ed and Lorraine Warren are contemplating retirement, following Lorraine's traumatic experience at the scene of a haunting in Amityville, New York, where she had a vision of Ed's death. One day, she dreams that she sees an evil nun in her home, reminding her of Amityville and further shaking her confidence in continuing as a ghost-hunter. Ed convinces her that they should go to England to help the Hodgsons. When they arrive, however, Lorraine says she can't sense any ghosts; this causes the authorities to think that the Hodgsons are faking the demonic presence. Janet is possessed by the spirit of a dead man, Bill Wilkins, who appears at night in different guises, but when she's caught on camera bending a spoon with her hands, it's considered proof of a hoax. The Warrens decide to leave, but Ed realises that Bill is a pawn for a more powerful demon – Valak, who had been the subject of Lorraine's visions. Ed and Lorraine return to the house just in time to save Janet and banish Valak back to hell, in the process averting Lorraine's prophecy of Ed's death. The Hodgsons' lives return to normal and the Warrens return home.**



Arab' Ahmed (we later learn that he was violent and unreliable). Thomas Bidegain's first film as director (he wrote the scripts for Jacques Audiard's *Dheepan* and *Rust and Bone*) clearly has not updated Ford's racial politics. Nor his sexual politics: this remains a story of male self-discovery, which typically feeds on the absence or marginalisation of women. Nicole is strangely disconnected from her daughter's disappearance and absent from the search, and Kelly herself, who briefly appears in Muslim garb at the end, remains a complete cipher. If it must be hard to come to terms with such a drama in real life, *Les Cowboys*, while it holds our attention thanks to the performances from Damiens and to a lesser extent Oldfield, does not particularly shed light on it. An intriguing but ultimately disappointing take on a burning contemporary topic. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Alain Attal	du Trésor present	Tax Shelter Films
<b>Written by</b> Noé Debie	A film by Thomas Bidegain	Funding, Cinéfrance
Thomas Bidegain	A co-production of Pathé, Les Productions du Trésor, France 2	Tax Shelter
From an idea by Thomas Bidegain, Laurent Abitbol	Cinéma, Lunanime, Les Films du Fleuve, VOO et BE TV, RTBF (Télévision Belge)	<b>Executive Producer</b> Xavier Amblard
<b>Director of Photography</b> Arnaud Potier	With the participation of Canal+, Ciné+, France Télévisions	<b>Cast</b>
<b>Editing</b> Géraldine Mangelot	In association with cofinova 11, Cinéimage 9	François Damiens
<b>Music by/Guitar Played by</b> Raphael	With the participation of Centre National du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée, Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de la Fédération Wallonie Bruxelles and La Prociép, Artemis Productions	Alain
<b>Sound</b> Pierre Mertens	With the support of Tax Shelter du Gouvernement Fédéral de Belgique,	Finnegan Oldfield
Vincent Mauduit		kid
Eric Lesachet		Agathe Dronne
Steven Ghouti		Nicole
<b>Costumes</b> Emmanuelle Youchnovski		Ellora Torchia
		Shahzana
		Antoine Chappey
		Charles
		Maxim Driesen
		kid, aged 13
		John C. Reilly
		the American
		<b>Dolby Digital</b>
		In Colour
		[2.35:1]
		Subtitles
		<b>Distributor</b>
		Studiocanal Limited

North-east France, the mid-1990s. Alain, his wife Nicole, son Kid and teenage daughter Kelly enjoy attending cowboy rallies. During one such event, Kelly goes missing. It emerges that she has been seeing a young Muslim, Ahmed, who has also disappeared. Frustrated by police inactivity, Alain follows various leads (with help from Ahmed's father), which take him further afield in Europe and beyond, but he fails to find Kelly.

Several years later, Alain's obsessive search has destroyed his marriage and alienated his friends, although the grown-up Kid still supports him. Kelly writes home, telling of the birth of her children. Alain's behaviour becomes increasingly erratic and he dies after crashing his car. Kid, galvanised by the 9/11 attacks in Manhattan, takes up the search, ending up in Chaman, on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. There, with the help of an American adventurer, he finds Ahmed, now with another wife, Shazhana. Kid kills Ahmed in self-defence. He and Shazhana, accused of being spies, are sent to jail and condemned to death. The French consulate intervenes to free Kid, who bribes a prison guard to take Shazhana home. The two fall in love and have a son. Thanks to a tip-off from Ahmed's father, Kid finds his sister (wearing a hijab) working in a shop in Belgium. They silently look at each other and smile.

## Down by Love

France/Belgium 2015

Director: Pierre Godeau

Certificate 15 110m 15s

### Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

The English title of this film struggles to capture the essence of the French original, *Éperdument*, which can mean something like 'truly, madly, deeply' when applied to love, but also implies a kind of blind or wilful recklessness, and derives from an Old French word meaning 'to lose one's way'. Loosely based on a recent notorious scandal in France, in which a prison governor was jailed for having sex with a pretty young inmate half his age, *Down by Love* attempts to tread a careful line between depicting the affair as an emotional thunderclap that overpowered them with its irresistible momentum and admitting that the governor, here called Jean Fermino (Guillaume Gallienne), was the lust-addled agent of his own downfall.

Writer-director Pierre Godeau has stripped the story back to its basics, allowing the attraction Jean feels for Anna (Adèle Exarchopoulos) to be presented at first as a simple case of overwhelming sexual chemistry; Racine's play *Phèdre*, a tragedy about forbidden love, is enlisted as a reference point to underline the idea that passion is beyond our control. As the film progresses, however, it becomes impossible for the audience to ignore the moral and ethical complications of this asymmetrical relationship, even though Jean seems determined to do so. He is powerless to resist Anna's toothsome charms, yet it is he who has control over her fate, through the bureaucratic powers of his office. Godeau makes this crystal clear, just as he carefully deploys Jean's sympathetic wife and charming young daughter (Stéphanie Cléau and Aliénor Poisson) to remind us of the real-world consequences of his midlife *amour fou*.

While we are allowed these insights into Jean's inner life – helped by Gallienne's typically mesmerising performance – Anna unfortunately remains a reductive cipher, the pouting temptress who exists only to drive men mad. She has some baffling scenes with her mother (Marie



Adèle Exarchopoulos, Guillaume Gallienne

Rivière) and discusses her fatherless childhood, but the question of how far she is manipulating Jean, either consciously or unconsciously, is left dangling. This may be because the film is based on a book written by the real-life prison governor Florent Gonçalves, and thus privileges his point of view, or it may be down to Godeau's reluctance to open a particularly nasty can of worms. French audiences will be only too aware that Anna is based on Emma Arbabzadeh, who had been jailed for her part in a gruesome anti-Semitic murder in which the victim was brutally tortured for three weeks. In the film, we learn only that she has committed a crime carrying a long sentence, and that she feels guilty. The crucial fact is that Arabzadeh's role in the crime was as a seductress – she lured the victim into the trap with a promise of sex – and although the film elides this, it's there all the same and leaves the door open for an interpretation that exculpates Jean as just another victim of an evil succubus.

Ultimately, this interaction between fact and fiction doesn't enrich the film so much as muddy the emotional waters. Despite strong performances, the film lacks grit, and Godeau's refusal to take a moral position doesn't make his take interestingly subtle and ambiguous – it just feels like a bit of a cop out. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Philippe Godeau	Hervé de Luze	Distribution, Don't Be Shy Productions, Versus Production	of Canal+, Ciné+ and of France Télévisions	Godeau	Sonia
Nathalie Gastaldo	Art Director Stéphane Taillasson		In association with Indéfils 4, SofiTVciné 2	<b>Executive Producer</b> David Giordano	Sabila Moussadek
Godeau	<b>Original Music</b> Rob		With the support of Tax Shelter du Gouvernement Fédéral Belge, Inver Invest		Aida
Cyril Colbeau-Justin	<b>Sound</b> Jean Umansky	<b>Production Companies</b> Pan Européenne, LGM Cinéma and Studiocanal present a co-production of Pan Européenne, LGM Cinéma, Studiocanal, France 2 Cinéma, Appaloosa	Developpement, Bleu et Jaune	<b>Cast</b>	<b>Dolby Digital</b>
Jean-Baptiste Dupont	Thomas Desjonquères		Productions 6 - Indéfils Initiative 3	Guillaume Gallienne	In Colour
<b>Screenplay</b> Pierre Godeau	Cyril Holtz		A film by Pierre	Jean Firmino	[2.35:1]
Freely adapted from the novel <i>Défense d'aimer</i> by Florent Gonçalves, Catherine Siguret	<b>Costume Designer</b> Judith de Luze			Adèle Exarchopoulos	Subtitles
<b>Director of Photography</b> Muriel Cravatte				Anna Amari	<b>Distributor</b>
<b>Editor</b>				Stéphanie Cléau	Studiocanal Limited
				Elise Firmino	
				Aliénor Poisson	French theatrical title
				Louise Firmino	<i>Éperdument</i>
				Cyrielle Martine	
				Zoé	
				Selma Mansouri	

Versailles, present day. Anna arrives at a new prison, already clearly familiar with the routines of incarceration. At first she is virutally silent, but she gradually responds to the enlightened regime of governor Jean Fermino. He takes a particular interest in her case and she reacts warmly; when he begins to flirt with her, she responds and they are soon having regular sex. Jean becomes obsessed with her and begins to neglect his wife and daughter. When he learns that Anna has access to an illicit phone, he texts and calls her frequently, so that his wife becomes

suspicious and eventually asks him to move out of the family home. Rumours spread about the affair and culminate in a formal investigation. Anna is moved to another prison but Jean picks her up when she is granted day release, and takes her to a hotel. However, they argue about what they will do once her sentence is finished. When she learns that she is pregnant, she ends the affair and arranges for an abortion. He is arrested and advised by his lawyers to say that she manipulated him to gain special treatment. At the trial, their eyes meet and he is clearly as smitten as ever.

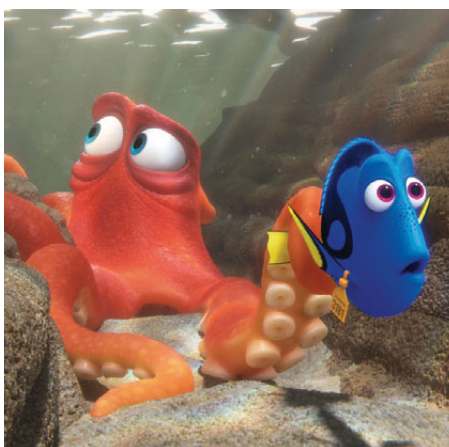
# Finding Dory

USA 2016  
Director: Andrew Stanton  
Certificate U 102m 57s

## Reviewed by Violet Lucca

A perfectly wonderful but not earth-shattering entry to the Pixar pantheon, Andrew Stanton's *Finding Dory* returns to the themes of parental love and worry in 2003's *Finding Nemo* and embroiders them with more advanced, winsome animation. Unlike last year's *Inside Out*, this film doesn't get into any larger ontological questions, which is perfectly fine — these are fish. Set one year after the original, *Finding Dory* follows forgetful blue tang Dory (voiced by the always wonderful Ellen DeGeneres) as she attempts to reunite with her long-lost parents, the least complicated step of which is crossing the ocean from the Great Barrier Reef to California's Morro Bay. Although the obstacles in her path are frequently fantastical (intermittently abandoning plausibility altogether), they don't feel like passing through different levels of a videogame, which is certainly more than one could say about Alfonso Cuarón's *Gravity* or Alejandro González Iñárritu's *The Revenant*.

Above all else, Dory triumphs over the negative expectations others have of her. Never hitting the pathos or proselytising too hard, her struggles with short-term memory loss offer some realistic insights and a positive view on disability. (Consider this a much needed corrective to the insulting, retrograde depiction on display in *Me Before You*.) Dory's inability to remember certain things changes the way she interacts with the world, but we're shown how her difference is a disadvantage and an asset in equal measure. When other characters are presented with a seemingly hopeless situation and are ready to give up, Dory keeps going, and she demonstrates why it's not just important but necessary to continue trying until you get it right. Her resilience is matched only by her ingenuity, which allows for some hilarious physical comedy: at Dory's urging, cuddling otters are enlisted to create a traffic jam on the freeway while Hank (Ed O'Neill), a seven-legged octopus (or "septopus", as Dory dubs him),



The current moment: *Finding Dory*

steals a giant lorry from aquarium employees and navigates it through a roundabout. (For context, the roundabout sequence is more impressive to American audiences than to European ones.)

Meanwhile Nemo (Hayden Rolence) and worrywart papa Marlin (Albert Brooks) are relegated to the background, though they still get some wacky bits of derring-do, the silliest of which are facilitated by a pair of yobbish sea lions voiced by Idris Elba and Dominic West. (Playing with the notion of celebrities doing VO work, the marine institute where most of the action takes place has an automated tour that's read by Sigourney Weaver — as Sigourney Weaver — and is treated like a real presence by the sea creatures living there.) But despite their reduced screen time, Dory refuses to abandon her surrogate family, even after she finds her parents, and sometimes at great personal risk. Her grand acts of love and kindness, very often inspired by half-formed memories, offer children another worthy and subtle lesson by example: it's better to approach the world with openness and trust than with suspicion ☹

## Credits and Synopsis

**Co-directed by**  
Angus MacLane  
**Produced by**  
Lindsey Collins  
**Screenplay**  
Andrew Stanton  
Victoria Strouse  
**Original Story**  
Andrew Stanton  
**Directors of Photography**  
Camera:  
Jeremy Lasky  
**Lighting:**  
Ian Megibben  
**Film Editor**  
Axel Geddes  
**Production Designer**  
Steve Pilcher  
**Music**  
Thomas Newman  
**Sound Designer**  
Tim Nielsen  
**Supervising Animators**  
David DeVan  
Michael Stocker

Disney presents  
a Pixar Animation  
Studios film  
**Executive Producer**  
John Lasseter

### Voice Cast

**Ellen DeGeneres**  
Dory  
**Albert Brooks**  
Marlin  
**Ed O'Neill**  
Hank  
**Kaitlin Olson**  
Destiny  
**Hayden Rolence**  
Nemo  
**Ty Burrell**  
Bailey  
**Diane Keaton**  
Jenny  
**Eugene Levy**  
Charlie  
**Sloane Murray**  
young Dory  
**Idris Elba**  
Fluke  
**Dominic West**  
Rudder  
**Bob Peterson**  
Mr Ray

**Kate McKinnon**  
wife fish  
**Bill Hader**  
Stan, husband fish  
**Sigourney Weaver**  
Sigourney Weaver

**Dolby Atmos**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

Some screenings  
presented in 3D

**Distributor**  
Buena Vista  
International (UK)

Running time  
102m 57s includes  
short film Piper  
(6m approx.)

Dory, a blue tang fish, lives with her parents in the Marine Life Institute in California. Her parents try to teach her how to cope with her short-term memory loss, and warn her of the dangers of getting caught in the undertow. One day, however, Dory becomes lost and can't remember how to get back home.

Years go by and she slowly forgets about returning to her parents. After helping clownfish Marlin find his son Nemo, Dory accompanies Nemo to school and suddenly remembers her parents during a lesson about migration. Dory, Nemo and Marlin cross the ocean to the Marine Life Institute. Dory is put into quarantine and tagged to be sent to the Cleveland aquarium. Hank, an octopus with seven arms, agrees to help her in exchange for her tag. They discover that her parents are in the Open Ocean exhibit. Meanwhile some sea lions arrange for Nemo and Marlin to be flown into the institute in a bucket carried by a bird. Nemo and Marlin reunite with Dory inside the building's pipes. Thinking that Dory's parents have been put in the truck to Cleveland, Hank puts Nemo, Dory and Marlin in the truck too — but Dory's parents aren't there. Dory falls into the ocean and finds her parents. She arranges a diversion to stop the truck so that Marlin and Nemo can escape. However, Dory becomes stuck in the truck. Hank hijacks the vehicle and drives it into the ocean, where everyone is reunited.

# Gods of Egypt

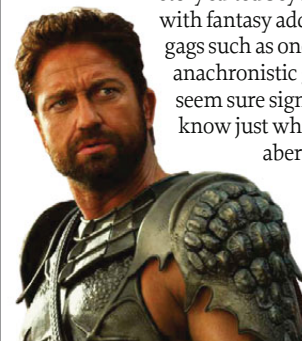
USA/Australia 2016  
Director: Alex Proyas  
Certificate 12A 126m 55s

## Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

No review of *Gods of Egypt* would be complete without reference to the criticisms of its whitewashed north-east Africa. It isn't to acquit the film's producers to point out that this is just one (the most deplorable) of a great many liberties taken.

The 12A rating is the key: this one's for the kids. No adult could but laugh at the maladroit dialogue and its delivery, as when Horus, beleaguered Lord of the Air, says intently, "I must go to my grandfather's," as if he meant to stop by a suburban bungalow where flat-back figures line the mantel. Actually, his granddad is the sun god Ra, who staffs a sort of space-barge towing "the source of creation". But I don't think the kids will be deceived by the CG-gilding, either. The film assumes that under-12s *want* their ancient history salted beyond recognition

with fantasy add-ons. Eerily, gags such as one involving an anachronistic gem lettuce seem sure sign that the creators know just what they're doing, aberrations and all. ☹



Gerard Butler

## Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Basil Iwanyk  
Alex Proyas  
**Written by**  
Matt Szazama  
Burk Sharpless  
**Director of Photography**  
Peter Menzies Jr  
**Editor**  
Richard Learoyd  
**Production Designer**  
Owen Paterson  
**Music**  
Marco Beltrami  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Peter Grace  
**Costume Designer**  
Liz Palmer  
**Visual Effects**  
Iloura  
Rising Sun Pictures  
Rodeo FX  
Cinesite  
UPP  
Raynault VFX  
Makeshift VFX

Tippett Studio  
Fin  
Cormen VFX  
**Stunt Supervisor**  
Glenn Boswell

©Summit  
Entertainment, LLC  
**Production Companies**  
Summit  
Entertainment  
presents a Thunder  
Road Pictures,  
Mystery Clock  
Cinema production  
An Alex Proyas film  
**Executive Producers**  
Stephen Jones  
Topher Dow  
Kent Kubena

**Cast**  
Nikolaj Coster-Waldau  
Horus  
Brenton Thwaites

Bek  
**Chadwick Boseman**  
Thoth  
**Elodie Yung**  
Hathor  
**Courtney Eaton**  
Zaya  
**Abbey Lee**  
Astarte  
**Yaya Deng**  
Anat  
**Rufus Sewell**  
Urshu  
**Gerard Butler**  
Set  
**Geoffrey Rush**  
Ra

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
El Films

Osiris rules over ancient Egypt, where gods and humans coexist. Set, his brother, is god of the desert. Set usurps the crown, intended for Osiris's son Horus, kills Osiris and plucks out Horus's eyes. Bek, a mortal, seeks to restore Horus to the throne. Throwing off assailants sent by Set, and with the help of allies Hathor (goddess of love) and Thoth (god of wisdom), Bek and Horus cooperate to recover Horus's eyes, and thus his strength. Set, who covets immortality, brings chaos upon Egypt by immobilising the sun god Ra, whose job it is to keep the demon Apophis at bay. Horus defeats Set in single combat. Wounded in the fracas, Bek dies — but at Horus's request, Ra recalls him from the afterlife, along with his deceased sweetheart Zaya. Horus becomes king of Egypt, and Bek is declared his chief adviser.



## The Hard Stop

United Kingdom/USA 2015  
Director: George Amponsah  
Certificate 15 85m 33s

See  
Development  
Tale on  
page 16

### Reviewed by Ros Cranston

"Everybody wants to change the world but no one wants to change themselves." This maxim from Leo Tolstoy concludes *The Hard Stop*, a powerful and

timely documentary whose main characters valiantly challenge that notion, against the odds.

Childhood friends Marcus and Kurtis grew up on the Broadwater Farm estate in Tottenham, north London, alongside Mark Duggan – a young black man who was killed by an armed police officer in 2011 following an arrest manoeuvre known as a hard stop, his death triggering local riots that soon spread across the UK. *The Hard Stop* focuses on the human story behind the fatal events in Tottenham and on the impact of Duggan's death on his family and friends, particularly Marcus and Kurtis, who are still struggling with the consequences.

Director George Amponsah began his career as a photographer, and since then has worked mainly for television. His first feature-length documentary, co-directed with Cosima Spender, was 2004's *The Importance of Being Elegant*, which explored the flamboyant fashion cult established by the colourful Congolese musician Papa Wemba. Amponsah's subsequent solo film, *The Fighting Spirit* (2007), followed three young Ghanaian boxers – two men and a woman – battling their way out of impoverished backgrounds to achieve prizefighting success.

*The Hard Stop* makes potent use of archive footage to establish the backdrop to the three friends' childhoods, notably media coverage of the notorious deaths of Cynthia Jarrett and PC Keith Blakelock on the Broadwater Farm estate in 1985, and of the more recent killing of Duggan and the subsequent inquest into the cause of his death.

Amponsah's empathetic interviews with Marcus and Kurtis, from behind the camera, are intercut with the archive material. At the film's visually stylish opening, shot inside a moving car, Marcus sums up his view of the police: "If they can't get you on the basis of hard evidence, they'll stitch you up." From this bleak starting point the film follows his and Kurtis's efforts to change their own lives in the face of their unpromising circumstances.


Kurtis has spent time in prison for drug-dealing – he explains wryly that he was "just trying to be a young entrepreneur". But now



Gang unrelated: Kurtis, Marcus

that he has two young sons, "It's not about me, it's about them." His efforts to escape his difficult past and find employment see him taking a telesales job that involves a commute from London to Norwich – demonstrating a job-seeking determination that surely even get-on-your-bike Norman Tebbit would admire.

Kurtis's irrepressible spirit is further illustrated by an alarming high-speed driving escapade, in which he weaves through multi-lane traffic in competition with another young male driver who challenges him to 'rally'. The manner in which they egg each other on is risky and irresponsible, but as far as the young participants are concerned it's just good-natured rivalry. This pursuit of short-lived, dangerous thrills – with little apparent regard for the consequences – can be seen as a reflection of the wider experience of many young men such as Kurtis, who come from underprivileged backgrounds and are desperate to escape hardship, if only momentarily.

The more gently spoken Marcus serves a prison sentence during the course of the film, having been named as an instigator of the Tottenham riots. Like Kurtis, he is determined to turn his life around, while also supporting Duggan's bereaved family in their efforts to establish the facts about his death. He converts to Islam, and becomes a youth mentor after his release from prison, devoting himself to encouraging young black men and boys to change their lives – by starting with themselves. Tolstoy would have been impressed. 

## Independence Day Resurgence

USA/Germany 2016  
Director: Roland Emmerich  
Certificate 12A 119m 34s

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

In 1996, Roland Emmerich's *Independence Day* crossbred H.G. Wells with Irwin Allen to produce *The Towering Inferno* on a global scale with aliens instead of a fire, or *War of the Worlds* reimagined as an American patriotic soap opera. Cannily cast with solid but not-too-stellar name actors and brought in at a bargain price for an effects-driven blockbuster, *ID4* was a runaway box-office success and established a template that Emmerich, Michael Bay and others have followed. It was even an influence on Steven Spielberg's actual adaptation of *War of the Worlds* (2005), which went out of its way to avoid looking like it. Emmerich has lately alternated odd, 'personal' projects that have few fans (*Anonymous*, *Stonewall*) with alien-free *ID4* knock-offs such as *The Day After Tomorrow* and 2012; here, he returns to the wellspring of his career with a long-in-the-works sequel.

Unusually, Emmerich and Dean Devlin (who co-wrote *Independence Day* and returns among a posse of scribes for the follow-up) have an interest in the world-building aspect of science fiction as well as the world-trashing spectacle of mass disaster. The opening act of *Resurgence* is a reasonably thought-through vision of a potentially utopian parallel world predicated on the Earth fighting off alien invaders in 1996. The planet is united and free from internal conflicts, and technology from crashed spaceships has been reverse-engineered to create clean energy monorails, frictionless helicopters, defence installations on the moon (and Saturn) and implied universal racial and sexual tolerance. It's almost the 21st-century Gerry Anderson envisioned in the 1960s, though Emmerich dodges real political implications. In lieu of showing how this unified world really works, time is passed until the monsters show up on petty squabbles (who nearly killed who in pilot training), soap-opera romances (has the earthbound fiancée looked at real-estate listings?) and parent-child complications.

The opening of *Resurgence* lacks the thrum of tension of the original film, and trips over needless complication (the Earth shoots first – against the wrong aliens!) before a continent-sized craft ("It has its own gravity") settles over the Atlantic and (borrowing an evil plan from *Daleks Invasion Earth 2150 AD*) begins boring to obtain the molten core of the Earth. While chiselled model types play *Top Gun* with spaceships, grizzled veterans such as Jeff Goldblum and Bill Pullman earnestly apply themselves to daffy science and crusty complaints – though it all comes down to a big dumb plot get-out whereby the whole invasion is called off if the *kaiju*-sized queen alien is downed by a mass attack.

Dialogue is as endearingly terrible as ever ("We expect the devastation on the East Coast to be beyond imagination"), and it's a shame so many interesting women (Charlotte Gainsbourg, Maika Monroe, Joey King, Vivica A. Fox, Angelababy, Sela Ward) get strong introductions but are then demoted to standing around asking questions, or sacrificed to motivate the heroic fight-back. However, even in arrant cliché progress is made: a standard scene where someone dies in a firefight and their partner vows to fight on

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Dionne Walker  
**Producers**  
Dionne Walker  
George Amponsah  
**Camera**  
George Amponsah  
**Cinematography**  
Colin Elves  
Matthias Pilz  
**Edited by**  
James Devlin  
Michael Aaglund  
**Composer**  
Roger Goula  
**Sound**  
Jez Spencer  
Paul Mallett

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Institute  
**Production  
Companies**  
BFI presents  
in association  
with Bertha  
Foundation and  
Sundance Institute  
Documentary  
Film Program a  
Ga Films production  
A film by George  
Amponsah  
Made with the  
support of the  
BFI's Film Fund  
**Executive Producer**  
Joe Bini

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]  
**Distributor**  
Metrodome  
Distribution Ltd

A documentary about childhood friends Marcus and Kurtis, who grew up in Tottenham, north London, alongside Mark Duggan – a black man killed by an armed police officer in 2011, during a 'hard stop' arrest. Using archive footage and contemporary interviews with Marcus and Kurtis, the film follows their efforts to improve their lives – against the backdrop of the inquest into Duggan's death and the campaigning efforts of his family and friends to bring the police to account. Marcus is imprisoned for his role in the Tottenham riots that followed Duggan's death. Kurtis struggles to find work in London and commutes to a telesales job in Norwich, before becoming a park ranger back in his home city. On his release from prison, Marcus becomes a mentor to young black boys, including Duggan's son Kamani, showing them an alternative to life in gangs.

becomes more than rote when the couple are middle-aged men (valorising Brent Spiner's flaky gay genius here might be Emmerich making up for literally wasting Harvey Fierstein last time round). The inclusion of a relatively large Chinese contingent and a machete-wielding African warlord (Deobia Oparei) among the planet's saviours might be mandated by a need to stoke up box-office interest in new territories but also undercuts the flag-draped Americanism – espoused by a German filmmaker, remember – that is the campiest aspect of the franchise.

Amid untidy plotting, stock characters and lazy punchlines (it's probably time for a moratorium on heroes calling female monsters 'bitch'), this still finds room for a kind of widescreen, huge-scale awe that stirs even the most cynical viewer. **B**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Dean Devlin

Harald Kloser

Roland Emmerich

#### Screenplay

Nicolas Wright

James A. Woods

Dean Devlin

Roland Emmerich

James Vanderbilt

#### Story

Dean Devlin

Roland Emmerich

Nicolas Wright

James A. Woods

Based on characters

created by Dean

Devlin, Roland

Emmerich

#### Director of

Photography

Markus Förderer

#### Film Editor

Adam Wolfe

#### Production

Designer

Barry Chusid

#### Music

Thomas Wander

Harald Kloser

#### Production

Sound Mixer

David Brownlow

#### Costume Designer

Lisy Christl

#### Visual Effects

Uncharted Territory

Scanline VFX

Weta Digital Limited

MPC

Image Engine

Cinesite

Digital Domain

Trixter Film

LUX Studios

#### Stunt-co-ordinator

John Stoneham, Jr

©Twentieth

#### Century Fox Film

Corporation and

TSG Entertainment

Finance LLC

#### Production

Companies

Twentieth Century

Fox presents in

association with TSG

Entertainment a

Centropolis/Electric

Entertainment

Production

A Roland

Emmerich film

#### Executive

Producers

Larry Franco

Ute Emmerich

Carsten Lorenz

#### Cast

Liam Hemsworth

Jake Morrison

Jeff Goldblum

David Levinson

Bill Pullman

President Thomas

J. Whitmore

Maika Monroe

Patricia Whitmore

Jessie T. Usher

Dylan Hiller

Travis Tope

Charlie Miller

William Fichtner

General Joshua

Adams

Charlotte

Gainsbourg

Dr Catherine

Marceaux

Judd Hirsch

Julius Levinson

Brent Spiner

Dr Brackish Okun

Sela Ward

President Elizabeth

#### Lanford

Angelababy

Rain Lao

Joey King

Sam

Vivica A. Fox

Jasmine Dubrow

Hillier

Robert Loggia

General Grey

Nicolas Wright

Floyd Rosenberg

Deobia Oparei

Dikembe Umbutu

Chin Han

Commander Jiang

Patrick St. Esprit

Secretary of

Defense Tanner

Gbenga Akinnagbe

Agent Travis

John Storey

Dr Isaacs

#### Dolby Atmos

In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

20th Century Fox

International (UK)

## Keanu

USA 2016

Director: Peter Atencio

Certificate 15 99m 38s

### Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

On *MADtv* and the five seasons of their sketch show *Key and Peele*, Keegan-Michael Key and Jordan Peele found their comfort zone in three-minute segments – long enough to hone in on one joke, short enough not to exhaust themselves. Like many a comics' feature vehicle, *Keanu*'s main task is to place the duo in multiple settings that can let them riff at will while minimising dull connective tissue.

Key and Peele specialise in dissections of code-switching: moments in which their black characters must adjust their language (both verbal and body) to project varying degrees of broadly signified 'blackness' or more reined-in 'white-sounding' personas. Both comics are biracial and have spoken extensively about code-switching's role in their lives, with a repeated emphasis on how they default to 'white' in word choice and inflection. One of their TV show's most noted characters was Key's Luther, an 'anger translator' who irately amplifies Barack Obama's reserved language in ways that some white listeners would take racially charged offence at if delivered by the president himself. In these and other sketches, Key and Peele's interrogation of race relations was often unavoidably placed in the context of whiteness and attendant questions of systemic racism and privilege.

*Keanu* removes whiteness from the equation: with few exceptions, it is a movie in which code-switching is activated solely within different tiers of black life, removing the need to 'act white' in business or other integrated contexts. The

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Jordan Peele

Keegan-Michael Key

Peter Principato

Paul Young

Joel Zadak

Written by

Jordan Peele

Alex Rubens

#### Director of

Photography

Jas Shelton

#### Editor

Nicholas Monsour

#### Production

Designer

Aaron Osborne

#### Music

Steve Jablonsky

Nathan Whitehead

#### Sound Mixer

Chris Welcker

#### Costumes

Designed by

Abby O'Sullivan

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Entertainment Inc.

#### and RatPac-Dune

Entertainment LLC

#### Production

Companies

A New Line Cinema

presentation in

association with

RatPac-Dune

Entertainment

A Monkeypaw/

Detroit Pictures

production

A Principato-Young

production

#### Executive

Producers

Toby Emmerich

Richard Brenner

Samuel J. Brown

Michael Disco

Ben Ormand

Steven Mnuchin

#### Cast

Keegan-

Michael Key

#### Clarence Gooch

Jordan Peele

Rell Williams

Tiffany Haddish

Hi-C

#### Method Man

Cheddar

Darrell Britt-Gibson

Trunk

Jason Mitchell

Bud

Luis Guzmán

Bacon

Will Forte

Hulka

Nia Long

Hannah

#### Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Distributor

Warner Bros.

Pictures

International (UK)



Dramatic paws: Keegan-Michael Key, Jordan Peele

plot thinly contrives to force Rell (Peele) and his friend Clarence (Key) to leave their suburban LA neighbourhoods and infiltrate an urban gang. This does not come naturally to them, and Rell accuses Clarence of sounding like Richard Pryor impersonating someone white. (Key promptly ups the ante: Peele sounds like John Ritter "all the time".) Predictably, their tentative stabs at talking 'street' create situations in which the mild-mannered duo are forced to hastily graft on black vernacular to cover their incongruous presence. In the most amusing recurring gag, Clarence wins over a van of drug dealers to George Michael, presenting him as a black performer whose lack of a father figure contributed to his personal angst.

The pair are directed by long-time *Key and Peele* helmer Peter Atencio; plausible widescreen compositions avoid the awkwardness of an inelegantly blown-up skit, and the few shootouts are handled with low-excitement competence. A slow comic amble rather than an attempt at inducing relentless laughs, *Keanu* spikes in energy with well-chosen cameos (Anna Faris as a monstrosity coked-up version of 'herself', Luis Guzmán as the ultimate self-assured crime boss) and maintains an easy rhythm otherwise, thanks to the gang's smooth camaraderie. As the token tough girl, Tiffany Haddish gets her first major film part and is skilled enough to plausibly sell the romance that inevitably blooms with Rell; she's ably backed by Darrell Britt-Gibson and Jason Mitchell (*Straight Outta Compton*'s Eazy-E). Forays into *Harold & Kumar*-esque drug-trip comedy are wanly attempted and less successful; unsurprisingly, the movie hits a relaxedly sustainable pace when it allows a vanful of comic performers to bounce off each other.

Key and Peele's jokes are adroitly timed and micro-attentively specific to their milieus, but the smallness and safety of the same relatively mild joke being hit over and over has diminishing returns. On one hand, the duo's stated goal is valid: seeing people like themselves on screen while expanding mainstream Hollywood's accepted definition of black characters. But when Key appeared in person as 'Luther' to translate Obama at an annual press dinner, he conveyed a real sense of disconnect and anger over a president whose every action has been racially parsed in ways that should give obvious pause; in a comic universe of their own devising, the duo seem unable to probe the truly uncomfortable and memorable. **B**

**Present day.** Twenty years after the Earth repulsed a mass invasion, an alien ship appears on the moon and, though it is not from the same alien culture as before, is shot down. A giant spaceship, responding to a signal from the defeated invaders, settles on the Atlantic and begins to drill to the Earth's core. Ex-president Thomas Whitmore and scientist veterans of the earlier interplanetary war learn from a virtual intelligence found on the ship on the moon that a resistance coalition of the invaders' enemies exists in deep space. The alien queen is lured to capture this intelligence, which will enable it to defeat its interstellar enemies. The defenders of Earth make a stand at Area 51 in Nevada and destroy the queen, ending the immediate threat.



## K-Shop

United Kingdom 2015  
Director: Dan Pringle

### Reviewed by Anton Bitel

Although formally subdivided into a prologue and 13 sections (each with its own chapter heading), writer/director Dan Pringle's feature debut *K-Shop* is punctuated even more regularly by montages of antisocial behaviour, in which inebriated people are shown staggering, shouting, brawling, urinating, vomiting, having sex and passing out, all in the streets of an unnamed town on England's south coast. This weekend ritual of hedonistic (self-) destruction is a familiar enough spectacle up and down Britain – indeed, about half the footage used in these montages is real, captured guerrilla-style over several nights in Bournemouth. Yet Pringle's film mostly uses the fictions of genre to frame this cultural phenomenon.

Channelling (and distorting) the film's critical perspective is Salah (Ziad Abaza) – all at once a graduate student specialising in the socioeconomics of nation-building, a migrant outsider with a front-row view of the carnivalesque carousing from his kebab-shop counter, and a murderous vigilante tipped over the edge by the death of his father Zaki (Nayef Rashed) at the hands of drunken yobs. As Salah uses his basement to butcher the more irksome members of his passing trade and, Sweeney Todd-style, offloads their rotisserie flesh on to his oblivious customers, he might have become just another reactionary Paul Kersey (from the *Death Wish* series) or Harry Brown, but Pringle prefers, wisely, to problematise Salah's actions and keep the sympathetic yet psychotic hero dangling – along with his awful victims – on the moral meat hook.

Even as Salah quickly gains the admiration of young would-be apprentice Malik (Reece Noi), his rage-fuelled actions are presented as manic and misdirected. It takes local Arabic-speaking hotel manager Sarah (Kristin Atherton) – herself a former student of socioeconomics – to make Salah see a bigger, more analytical picture of the municipal malaise and recognise a reflection of his own damaged humanity in one of his more offensive captives (Darren Morfitt). Once Salah understands the real source of the town's ills – apart from himself – to be Jason Brown (Scot Williams), a one-time *Big Brother* winner turned corrupt club entrepreneur and drug dealer, our cultural critic seeks a more salubrious method for taking out the town's trash, all the while discovering that he is living in the same gutter as those he despises.

"The fundamental problem with you lot: you don't know how to have fun," Jason tells Salah (now himself bound in his own basement at another's mercy). "You open up these shitty shops, and you drive your shitty taxis, so you can get a little bit closer to it, but it don't work." Jason's racism also serves as a sly allusion to that classic of male alienation, delusion and violence, *Taxi Driver* (1976). Here too, in the end, Salah will be 'thanked' by the community for his actions, even if the viewer is rather less comfortable with his heroic status. Accordingly, in exposing the ugliness of binge culture in a manner part darkly comic, part deadly serious, *K-Shop* cleaves to a narrow path between satire and tragedy. 🍖



Strong meat: Ziad Abaza

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Adam J. Merrifield  
**Written by**  
Dan Pringle  
**Director of Photography**  
Chris Fergusson  
**Editor**  
Dan Pringle  
**Production Designer**  
Andrew Soakell  
**Music**  
**Composed by**  
Nina Humphreys  
**Location Sound**  
**Recordist**  
Glen Yard  
**Costumes**

Sally Winter  
©White Lantern  
Film (K-Shop) Ltd.  
**Production Companies**  
Bulldog Film  
Distribution presents  
a White Lantern  
Film production  
A Dan Pringle film  
**Executive Producers**  
Gellan Watt  
Tom Little  
**Cast**  
Ziad Abaza

Salah Sabir  
**Scot Williams**  
Jason Brown  
**Darren Morfitt**  
Steve  
**Kristin Atherton**  
Sarah Maloney  
**Ewen Macintosh**  
Nigel  
**Chris R. Wright**  
Terry

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Bulldog Film  
Distribution

South England, 2005. Salah returns from studying socioeconomics in London to look after his ailing father Zaki's kebab shop; he decides to stay on after Zaki is killed in an altercation with some drunks.

When aggressive customer Scott accidentally falls headfirst into the chip fryer one evening, Salah is unsure what to do; still angry over Zaki's death, he slices, grinds and cooks Scott, adding the meat to the lamb rotisserie. Later, drunk, abusive Chantelle smashes the computer that stored Salah's nearly finished dissertation, so he murders her and her friend. Other victims follow, including Billy, who deals drugs for nightclub entrepreneur Jason Brown. One night, observed by a local man named Malik, Salah chases a drunken vandal into a budget motel, where general manager Sarah (also a former student of socioeconomics) calms him down. Salah gives Malik a temporary job in the kebab shop. Salah imprisons drunk, racist Steve in the basement. However, after learning of Steve's loveless childhood, Salah repents and decides to let him go. In disguise, Salah films Jason sexually abusing a woman. Malik says that he wants to assist Salah's vigilantism; Salah fires him. Jason imprisons and drugs Salah, trying to intimidate him into handing over the shop. In a tussle, Jason stabs Salah, who dies like a drunk in the street.

Video evidence of sexual abuses and drugs manufacturing, which Salah planted earlier, leads to Jason's arrest.

## The Mafia Kills Only in Summer

Italy 2012  
Director: Pierfrancesco Diliberto  
Certificate 15 89m 15s

### Reviewed by Mary Harrod

*The Mafia Kills Only in Summer* offers a novel reconfiguration of the two most stereotypically Italian cinematic themes, love and criminal violence, which are in turn woven into a classic coming-of-age story. Arturo is born in 1970s Palermo to ordinary parents – ordinary in that the family's existence is shaped by the dealings of Cosa Nostra. His conception takes place during a shootout in the apartment below; his first word is 'Mafia'; and the mysterious deaths of Sicilian figures punctuate a childhood otherwise dominated by a burgeoning interest in journalism and politics and a romantic crush on classmate Flora. These passions resurface some years later when the last third of the film reunites Arturo and Flora on Christian Democrat Salvatore Lima's ill-fated electoral campaign.

Despite a romcom plot, then, the film is framed by political themes. Indeed, it opens with a dedication to some of the *carabinieri* killed by the Sicilian Mafia, and closes with a young boy being shown plaques laid in their memory. Such an emphasis follows in an indigenous political filmmaking tradition epitomised by the work of Nanni Moretti – although in its odd blend of comedy and deliberately downplayed hints at tragedy, the film perhaps aspires more to kinship with Roberto Benigni's *Life Is Beautiful* (1997) or even Jean-Pierre Jeunet's *Amélie* (2001).

Directed by television satirist Pif (born Pierfrancesco Diliberto), who also provides the voiceover and stars as the adult Arturo, the film is for the most part an ultra-light nostalgia piece set in a village-like Palermo of soft lighting, orange-toned interiors and period decor. Plotting and editing, matched by a frenetically upbeat score, are too fast-paced to allow for much sustained engagement with either child or adult characters, which is just as well considering the borderline slapstick approaches of several performers, including Pif himself. A sense of breathlessness results from the frequent references to real events, not only Mafia murders but also complex political narratives, with archive footage and clever editing used to insert Arturo and Flora into the historical past. Yet these allusions remain underdeveloped, at least in any meaningful way for anyone unfamiliar with late-20th-century Italian politics.

Given that the film's critical component resides in a subtly ironic take on the past, such knowledge makes a difference. Satirical potential arises from the use of the child's perspective, as in Benigni. The fact that Mafia killings are frequently explained away to the young Arturo by diplomatic adults as crimes of passion by jealous lovers makes a sardonic point with humour. Similarly, the inane tone created by the score, improbable plot and sometimes cartoonish characters actually gestures towards the inadequacy of trivial individual dramas to offset the social cataclysm of systemic violence. In deliberate contrast, we hear only silence when Flora's (empty) girlhood bedroom is blown apart by the horrific car-bomb assassination of judge Rocco Chinnici outside the building, signifying the death of innocence.

Yet in seeking to capture the banal everyday reality of Mafia rule, Pif allows a trite, highly

## Me Before You

USA 2016

Director: Thea Sharrock

Certificate 12A 110m 11s



Pierfrancesco Diliberto, Cristiana Capotondi

sentimental romance narrative to dominate. The final focus on murdered policemen feels tacked on, so buried have these events been in the barrage of narrative detail. Given the film's central literalisation of the notion of the personal as political, it is unfortunate that this ending simultaneously legitimises Italianate patriarchal social structures, notably reducing political careerist Flora to the role of mother of a male child embodying a supposedly more progressive future. Some people's 'personal' is more liberated than others', it would seem. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Mario Gianani  
Lorenzo Mieli

#### Screenplay

Michele Astori  
Pierfrancesco  
Diliberto  
Marco Martani

#### Story

Michele Astori  
Pierfrancesco  
Diliberto  
Marco Martani

#### Photography

Roberto Forza

#### Editor

Cristiano Travaglioli

#### Art Director

Marcello Di Carlo

#### Music

Santi Pulvirenti

#### Sound Recordist

Luca Bertolin

#### Costumes

Cristiana Ricceri

#### @Wildside

#### Production

#### Companies

Wildside and Rai  
Cinema presents a  
Wildside production  
with Rai Cinema  
with the  
participation of MTV  
with the contribution

of Direzione Generale  
per il Cinema and  
Ministero per i Beni  
e le Attività Culturali  
with the support  
of Regione Lazio  
Fondo Regionale  
per il Cinema e  
l'Audiovisivo  
in association with  
Giasone S.r.l.  
with the support  
of MEDIA  
Programme of the  
European Union  
**Executive Producer**  
Olivia Sleiter

#### Cast

#### Pif

[i.e. Pierfrancesco  
Diliberto]

Arturo

**Cristiana  
Capotondi**

Flora

**Alex Bisconti**

Arturo as a child

**Ginevra Antona**

Flora as a child

**Barbara Tabita**

Arturo's mother

**Rosario Lisma**

Arturo's father

**Enzo Salomone**

Rocco Chinnici  
**Maurizio Marchetti**

Jean Pierre

**Antonio Alveario**

Totò Riina,

'The Beast'

**Ninni Bruschetta**

Fra Giacinto

**Domenico**

**Centamore**

Leoluca Bacarella

**Roberto Burgio**

Giorgio Boris

Giuliano

**Attilio Fabiano**

Flora's father

**Orazio Stracuzzi**

newspaper editor

**Totò Borgese**

Salvatore Lima,

'Salvo'

**Claudio Gioè**

Francesco

**Dolby Digital**

**In Colour**

**[1.85:1]**

**Subtitles**

**Distributor**

Cinefile World

Italian theatrical title

**La mafia uccide**

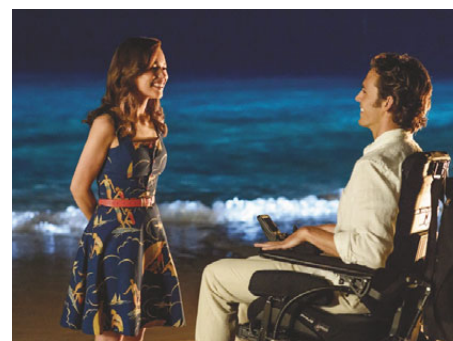
**solo d'estate**

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

Suicide rarely features in romances, with the honourable exceptions of *Harold and Maude's* pitch-black gags or *Leaving Las Vegas's* vodka-fuelled tragicomedy. The concept of assisted suicide, which dominates this film adaptation of the multimillion-selling novel *Me Before You*, seems a positively unlikely ingredient in a romantic comedy. Yet writer Jojo Moyes, adapting her own book, uses it here as the insuperable barrier to lasting romance between Will, a rich and handsome quadriplegic, and his chatty paid companion Lou.

Otherwise, it's a very conventional British romcom, with a poor girl and an arrogant boy nestled in picture-postcard English countryside (Pembroke, in Wales, in real life). Director Thea Sharrock sets it in Curtisland, that blessed isle wherein British romcoms reside, full of affable posh people, stately homes and heartwarming banter. When Will asks Lou to stay a while because he wants "to be a man who's been to a concert with a girl in a red dress for a few minutes more", there's a distinct whiff of *Notting Hill* (1999).

Despite his wheelchair, Sam Claflin's dryly sarcastic Will is a Hugh Grant-styled Mr Rochester figure, who widens working-class Lou's horizons with a classical concert, scuba-diving on a luxury holiday and her first subtitled film. Unlike Mr Rochester, however, Will can't bear post-accident life as the new 'broken' him, and grieves for his athleticism and independence. Since the narrative is thin, woven around the 'bucket list' of comic or luxurious outings that Lou concocts, the film's texture is created by the couple's bantering exchanges. Here Moyes's dialogue reaches too obviously for charm – Lou teaches Will the comforting nonsense song of her childhood, he archly calls her by her surname throughout, as if spoofing her paid status and his public-school mannerisms. Emilia Clarke's Lou, a Pollyanna-ish child-woman in the *Happy-Go-Lucky* vein, is self-consciously quirky, mugging likeably in her unsubtly 'kooky' clothing and wacky shoes. Somehow, they



Cinderella: Emilia Clarke, Sam Claflin

muster a warm if slightly patronising chemistry.

Much of the film recalls *Untouchable* (2011) in its mix of gloomy client and perky helper and the exchange of high culture for cheer, though it's complicated by the never addressed ethical questions of a patient-carer romance. The really big problems reside, however, in the film's handling of disability. Will's mourning for his lost life gets much screen time, but the fact that quadriplegics can and do have relationships, families and work is brushed aside. When Will laughs about the frustrations of Lou's breasts being at eye height, disabled sexuality is conveniently overlooked. Obviously inspired by the case of Daniel James, the 23-year-old paraplegic ex-rugby player who died at Dignitas in 2008, the story works hard to present Will's wish for assisted suicide as reasonable and noble. One can understand why disabled activists have condemned it, using the hashtag 'MeBeforeEuthenasia'.

Yet no film should be required to represent everything about the varied paraplegic experience – particularly one like *Me Before You*, which is fundamentally a cheerful-and-tearful chick flick about Lou and how her relationship transforms her life both emotionally and materially. Though Will changes her life, the film is firmly her story. Despite its torn-from-the-headlines topicality and unconventional ending, *Me Before You* still can't shake off that old Cinderella template. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Karen Rosenfelt

Alison Owen

#### Screenplay

Jojo Moyes

Based on her novel

#### Director of

**Photography**

Remi Adefarasin

#### Editor

John Wilson

#### Production Designer

Andrew McAlpine

#### Music

Craig Armstrong

#### Production

**Sound Mixer**

Tim Fraser

#### Costume Designer

Jill Taylor

#### @Warner Bros.

Entertainment Inc.

and Metro-Goldwyn-

Mayer Pictures

Inc. (the universe

excluding MGM

retained territories)

#### @Metro-Goldwyn-

Mayer Pictures Inc.

and Warner Bros.

Entertainment Inc.

(MGM retained

territories)

#### Production

**Companies**

New Line Cinema

and Metro-Goldwyn-

Mayer Pictures

present a Sunswept

Entertainment

production

#### Executive Producer

Sue Baden-Powell

#### Cast

**Emilia Clarke**

Lou Clark

**Sam Claflin**

Will Traynor

**Janet McTeer**

Camilla Traynor

**Charles Dance**

Stephen Traynor

**Brendan Coyle**

#### Bernard Clark

**Stephen Peacocke**

Nathan

**Matthew Lewis**

Patrick

**Jenna Coleman**

Katrina 'Treena' Clark

**Samantha Spiro**

Josie Clark

**Vanessa Kirby**

Alicia

#### Dolby Digital

**In Colour**

**[2.35:1]**

#### Distributor

Warner Bros. Pictures

International (UK)

**UK, present day. Unable to find work in her small town, quirky Lou takes a job as a companion to the rich, once sporty quadriplegic Will, now living in an annexe of his parents' house. His ex-girlfriend Alicia becomes engaged to his best friend. A bitter and depressed Will shuts Lou out. Defiantly, she insists that he behave better. They become friends. Will arranges for Lou's unemployed father to work at his family's castle. On discovering that Will wants to go to Dignitas for an assisted suicide, Lou starts a programme of cheering outings, some of which prove disastrous. She and Will flirt after attending a classical concert, and start a romance at Alicia's wedding. Lou's boyfriend Pat objects to their closeness and leaves her. Will is hospitalised with pneumonia, for the fifth time since his accident. A trip to Mauritius seals Lou and Will's romance, though he tells her that he still wants to end his life, and sets her free. A devastated Lou quits her job. After learning that Will has left for Switzerland, she rushes to be with him. She accepts his decision, and they are reconciled before his death.**

**In Paris, Lou starts her new life with a bequest from Will.**

**Palermo, the 1970s.** Arturo grows up surrounded by Mafia influence and violence. He becomes infatuated with classmate Flora. His attempts to woo her are initially unsuccessful because the 'Mafia boss' he says is hiding at his dead grandparents' old flat turns out to be a journalist, Francesco. Under Francesco's tutelage, Arturo becomes politicised, on the way winning a prize at school and catching Flora's eye. However, she moves to Switzerland with her family.

**In 1992,** Arturo is working at a local television station. He discovers that Flora has a prestigious role as assistant to politician Salvatore Lima. Flora hires Arturo to report on their campaign. At first she is unimpressed by his seeming political disengagement, but following Lima's murder they begin a relationship and later have a son, to whom they recount the history of Mafia atrocities.



## The Meddler

USA 2015  
Director: Lorene Scafaria  
Certificate 12A 103m 20s

### Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

The meddling mother is by now such a timeworn screen archetype that anyone approaching Lorene Scafaria's second feature is likely to feel a little trepidation. A cursory glance at the film's poster – with Susan Sarandon's titular busybody shooting a knowing sidelong look at nonplussed daughter Rose Byrne – is enough to supply a heavy dose of déjà vu and raise suspicion levels.

It comes as some relief, then, that *The Meddler*, while uneven and occasionally aimless, isn't altogether the cliché-ridden, saccharine affair that it sometimes threatens to be. It's a notable improvement on Scafaria's debut feature, the interminable *Seeking a Friend for the End of the World* (2012), and its trump card is a genuinely terrific, lived-in performance from Sarandon, who consistently convinces even when the film's wayward tone doesn't.

Sarandon plays recently widowed Marnie Minervini, a character closely based on Scafaria's own mother Gail. Having relocated to LA from her native New Jersey to be closer to daughter Lori (a nicely spiky turn from Byrne), a screenwriter weathering the fallout of a messy break-up, Marnie has become an overbearing irritant to her depressed offspring – forever dropping over unannounced at inopportune moments, inveigling herself into Lori's neglected social circle or interfering with her love life. Selfless and cheerfully brusque, Marnie has shielded herself from grief by keeping herself constantly distracted. She organises a wedding for one of Lori's friends, cares for a hospitalised senior and helps a young sales clerk mend a feud with his brother (the egregious Apple branding in this latter thread often makes the film resemble an extended promo for both the computer company and the upmarket Grove shopping mall that Marnie frequents).

When Lori departs for New York to shoot a TV pilot – the show-within-the-film providing

Scafaria with an extra metatextual narrative, since it's Lori's autobiographical story of her parents' lives – Marnie's self-possession starts to waver. There's also the prospect of an upcoming memorial for her late husband hanging in the air – and a return to feelings that had been successfully deflected since she swapped coasts. Both mother and daughter, as it turns out, have buried the pain of bereavement in different ways: Marnie has enthusiastically thrown herself into new situations and company, while Lori has grimly focused on work. Their scenes together are particularly well judged, with Scafaria's winningly naturalistic dialogue sidestepping the grand gestures or sentimental crescendos that might be found in a more predictable film. Even when the characters finally let their guards down, it's rendered in an understated form; Sarandon, especially, works wonders with Marnie's solitary breakdown on a plane, embarrassedly hiding her face from her fellow passengers. Meanwhile, Marnie's hesitant romance with genial ex-cop turned chicken farmer Zipper (an uncommonly beatific J.K. Simmons) plays out with goofy charm.

The strong cast goes a long way towards elevating some of Scafaria's weaker material, with one or two of Marnie's encounters – particularly her confrontation with her husband's Italian-American brothers – feeling a little slight and shapeless. There are some abrupt lurches into broad comedy that don't really gel with the surrounding fabric: an overextended scene where Marnie scoffs a bag of marijuana and floats around the mall in a daze, or her brutal reaction to the advances of a hapless admirer (Michael McKean). Scafaria throws gags into the script at surprising junctures – landing in Los Angeles, Marnie is almost detained by security when she announces, "My daughter just shot a pilot."

This is a film that seesaws, sometimes awkwardly, between insight and frivolity. But as a paean to mothers, it's heartfelt without overloading on syrup, while Sarandon's performance is one to savour. **S**



Susan Sarandon

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Joy Gorman Wettels  
**Written by**  
Lorene Scafaria  
**Director of Photography**  
Brett Pawlak  
**Editor**  
Kayla M. Emter  
**Production Designer**  
Chris Spellman  
**Music**  
Jonathan Sadoff

**Production Sound Mixer**  
Anthony Enns  
**Costume Designer**  
Annie Bloom  
  
©Sony Pictures  
Worldwide  
Acquisitions Inc.  
**Production Companies**  
A Sony Pictures  
Classics release

Stage 6 Films  
presents  
An Anonymous  
Content production  
A film by Lorene  
Scafaria  
**Executive Producer**  
Paul Green  
Steve Golin  
Shea Kramer  
Susan Sarandon

**Cast**  
**Susan Sarandon**  
Marnie Minervini  
**Rose Byrne**  
Lori Minervini  
**J.K. Simmons**  
Zipper  
**Cecily Strong**  
Jillian  
**Jerrold Carmichael**  
Freddy 'Fredo'  
**Michael McKean**  
Mark

**Jason Ritter**  
Jacob  
**Billy Magnussen**  
Ben  
**Lucy Punch**  
Emily  
**Sarah Baker**  
Elaine  
**Amy Landecker**  
Diane  
**Casey Wilson**  
Trish  
**Harry Hamlin**

TV dad  
**Laura San Giacomo**  
TV mom

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Sony Pictures  
Releasing UK

US, present day. After the death of her husband Joe, Marnie Minervini moves to Los Angeles from New Jersey to be close to her daughter Lori. A screenwriter reeling from a painful break-up with boyfriend Jacob, Lori resents Marnie's overbearing attention and interfering ways. When Lori flies to New York to shoot a TV pilot, Marnie focuses on others. She persuades a young sales clerk to reconcile with his brother, helps an elderly hospital patient locate her son, organises

the wedding of Lori's friend Jillian, and finds tentative romance with retired police officer Zipper. Visiting Lori in New York, Marnie clashes with Joe's brothers over plans for a memorial and where to scatter Joe's ashes. At Jillian's wedding, Marnie tries in vain to convince Jacob to rekindle his relationship with Lori. Zipper bails Marnie out when she's arrested for depositing Joe's ashes in the ocean. Marnie helps Lori through a false pregnancy alarm and the two become closer.

## Men & Chicken

Denmark/Germany/Sweden 2015  
Director: Anders Thomas Jensen  
Certificate 15 103m 54s

### Reviewed by Leigh Singer

Though best known as a freakishly prolific and versatile screenwriter (from Dogme 95's *Mifune* to the Oscar-winning *In a Better World* and most of his compatriot Susanne Bier's prestige features), Anders Thomas Jensen has a sideline directing his own work: offbeat, darkly comic dabbling in the margins, from the small-town cannibal delicacies of *The Green Butchers* (2003) to the neo-Nazi versus the Church in *Adam's Apples* (2005). *Men & Chicken*, his first film in ten years, sees him pushing even further into absurdist territory, splicing genres from brutal knockabout slapstick to mad-professor horror. At times it's like a modernised Marx Brothers take on Tod Browning's *Freaks* (1932).

Jensen regularly injects a sneaky philosophical bent into his material, and here the familiar nature-versus-nurture debate is given a blithely gruesome twist. Even more so than his habitual deadbeat protagonists, *Men & Chicken*'s five half-brothers are described in the opening fairytale-inspired voiceover as unfortunates "whom nature hadn't dealt the best of cards. In fact they hadn't been dealt any cards at all." Unable to function in the outside world, they are driven by compulsions they blindly follow but don't understand; their malformed facial features and distinctive cleft lips are merely the external signifiers of an innate corruption, all the more chilling when revealed as genetic mutations inflicted by their own deranged scientist father.

It's the sort of narrative gambit whose very lack of restraint can easily send the whole concoction spinning wildly out of control, and indeed more sensitive viewers may find the repeated cartoon-like violence and focus on physical deformities disturbing. Yet look closer and it's clear that Jensen has calibrated a blend of tones and styles far more carefully than his unseen scientist villain attempted in his warped experiments. The deliberate pacing allows for bursts of frenetic action, but the film more frequently takes the time to delve into the tragicomic group interplay and situate the characters in their cocooned environment. Jensen is helped no end by Mia Stensgaard's superbly atmospheric production design, which genuinely fulfils that common cliché of making the location – the brothers' sanatorium home – a multifaceted character in its own right, part *Psycho* 'old dark house', part *Deliverance* backwoods nightmare.

All this accomplished filmmaking and impressive facial prosthetics aside, it's the actors – a roster of Denmark's A-list male talent now familiar from hit Scandinavian TV series and



Fowl play: Mads Mikkelsen

## Ming of Harlem Twenty One Storeys in the Air

United Kingdom/USA/Belgium/France 2014

Director: Phillip Warnell

Certificate U 70m 50s

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

If you live in New York City, as I happen to, and are an inveterate reader of the commuter tabloid papers – and I see no other reason why anyone would choose to stay in this hellhole – you get into the habit of marking the eras of your life in terms of juicy headlines. One of the first really good ones that I can remember was the story of Antoine Yates, arrested in 2003 for harbouring a menagerie in his apartment in the Drew Hamilton Houses in Harlem, his prize possessions being a three-year-old Bengal tiger called Ming and a seven-foot alligator named Al.

Yates is the 'star', after a fashion, of Phillip Warnell's abstract documentary *Ming of Harlem*, which premiered at the FIDMarseille hybrid-doc festival in 2014 and is, perhaps fortuitously, only now making its way into UK cinemas. I say fortuitously because the moral issue of animal captivity has been much in the air lately following the death of a two-year-old boy in an alligator attack at Walt Disney World and a close call for a four-year-old who tumbled into the gorilla enclosure at Cincinnati Zoo. News items such as these exert an unusual fascination – we may be injured to all species of human monstrosity but brushes with the animal kingdom retain some novelty in this day and age.

Yates proves a riveting subject. Like Mabel Stark, the renowned tiger trainer seen in the archive footage that opens the film, he too is "shy, soft-spoken and unassuming" as he recounts his story while cruising through Harlem in a hired car, pointing out where new chain restaurants have sprouted up since he left town.

In the years following his arrest for reckless endangerment and possession of a wild animal, which ended with the confiscation of both Ming and Al, Yates has relocated to Las Vegas, where, with the assistance of sympathetic celebrities including the late Michael Jackson, he has rebuilt his animal collection. Yates's later life is scarcely addressed in Warnell's film; not at all discussed are the means whereby he managed to illegally purchase his first large cats, nor the tacit code of silence that allowed him to keep his animals in a crowded apartment building. The director instead has his eyes on what he evidently considers to be bigger philosophical game, for the material with Yates bookends a nearly half-hour centrepiece



Animal house: Antoine Yates

in which a Bengal tiger and an alligator wander through a recreation of Yates's apartment habitat built at two British animal enclosures, the Isle of Wight Zoo and Crocodiles of the World in Oxfordshire. (The 'reveal' of this rather evident artifice comes in the closing credits, over shots of the ceilingless sets taken from above.)

At first silent save for very precise sound recordings, these images are in time accompanied by the voice of Icelandic musician Hildur Gudnadóttir (who also provides the frenetic cello soundtrack) reading the poem 'Oh the Animals of Language' by philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy. Along with Jacques Derrida, who provides the film's epigraph, Nancy is the film's intellectual guiding light – at one point the tiger's yowls are 'translated' on screen into Nancy's verse. Perhaps Warnell wishes to suggest something about how we impose our own meaning on to inscrutable animals, just as perhaps the chorus of police scanner calls is meant as a commentary on our role as specimens in the larger social zoo. What he's neglected is the element of seduction that might draw a viewer deeper into these questions – in place of this, there's the sense of a very wild story moulded into something arid, pseudo-sophisticated and terribly tame. Ⓢ

acclaimed European cinema – who ultimately make the man-or-beast conceit feel so, well, natural. A star of all Jensen's directorial efforts (and several that he's only scripted), Mads Mikkelsen will be unrecognisable to those most familiar with his urbane Euro-villainy in the Bond film *Casino Royale* (2006) or in television's *Hannibal*. Yet as we saw with his balding, flop-sweating antagonist in *The Green Butchers*, he and Jensen clearly relish playing against type and subverting expectations, to usually enjoyable effect. While the pair have gone on to breakout mainstream success (Jensen's next script is for the Stephen King epic *The Dark Tower*), *Men & Chicken* proudly makes the case for sustaining the evolution of supposedly less valuable life forms amid the dominant species. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Kim Magnusson

Tivi Magnusson

#### Screenplay

Anders Thomas

Jensen

#### Director of

Photography

Sebastian Blenkov

#### Editor

Anders Villadsen

#### Production Design

Mia Stensgaard

#### Music

Frans Bak

Jeppe Kaas

#### Sound Designer

Nino Jacobsen

#### Costume Design

Manon Rasmussen

©M&M Productions

A/S, Studio

Babelsberg, DCM

Productions and

M&M Mænd &

høns ApS

#### Production

Companies

M&M Productions

presents in

co-production with

Studio Babelsberg

#### & DCM Productions

Produced by M&M

Productions A/S in

co-production with

Studio Babelsberg

and DCM Production

in association

with FilmFyn, Film

i Väst, ZDF/Arte

and NADCON

With support from

Danish Film Institute,

DR by Filmklubben,

German Federal Film

Fund, Medienboard

Berlin-Brandenburg,

German Federal Film

Board, Eurimages,

Investitionsbank

des Landes

Brandenburg,

Investitionsbank

Berlin

#### Executive

Producers

Christoph Fisser

Carl Woebcken

Hennning Møller

Dario Suter

Christoph Daniel

Marc Schmidheiny

Joel Brandeis

#### Cast

Mads Mikkelsen

Elias

David Dencik

Gabriel

Nikolaj Lie Kaas

Gregor

Søren Malling

Franz

Nicolas Bro

Josef

#### Dolby Atmos

In Colour

[2.35:1]

#### Subtitles

Distributor

Arrow Films

Danish theatrical title

Mænd & høns

English subtitles title

Men and Chicken

Denmark, present-day. After their elderly father's death, misfit, cleft-lipped brothers Elias and Gabriel discover a videotape he made in which he confesses that he is not their biological father: they are in fact half-brothers sired by maverick Danish-Italian evolutionary geneticist Evelio Thanatos. Shocked by this knowledge, and with Gabriel desperate to learn about his birth mother, they trace Thanatos to a small community on the remote island of Ork. In a rundown mansion, Thanatos is guarded by three more half-brothers, the similarly cleft-lipped Franz, Josef and Gregor, who initially rebuff Elias and Gabriel's enquiries with hostility but eventually, grudgingly, allow them to stay, while continuing to keep their bedridden father hidden on the top floor.

Elias becomes involved in his half-brothers' bizarrely childlike, often violent rituals, including bedtime stories and badminton matches; they even venture out of the house to attempt to woo the local women. Gabriel is alarmed by the deformed livestock that wander the house. Eventually he learns that their father died some time ago. He convinces Gregor to grant him access to the off-limits basement laboratory, where he discovers the true extent of his father's experiments: he impregnated the half-brothers' various mothers (none of whom survived the procedure) with a mixture of animal semen and his own stem cells to create sterile, hybrid offspring. Outraged, Gabriel initially wants to flee, but finally the brothers decide to stay together as a family.

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Produced by

Phillip Warnell

Madeline Molyneux

#### Text

Jean-Luc Nancy

#### Cinematography

David Raedeker

#### Editors

Phillip Warnell

Chiara Armentano

#### Architectural Design

Tomas Klassnik

#### Music & Voice

Hildur Gudnadóttir

#### Sound Recordists

David Hocs

Chu-Li Shewring

Adam Gutch

©Big Other Films

Production

#### Companies

Big Other Films

presents a film by

Phillip Warnell

A co-production

with The Wellcome

Trust, Picture

Palace Pictures,

Michigan Films

Supported by The

Wellcome Trust,

Vlaans Audiovisueel

Fonds, Centre

du Cinéma et de

l'Audiovisuel de la

Fédération Wallonie-

Bruxelles & VOO, Arts

Council England,

Kingston University,

Fidlab Marseille

Executive Producers

Meroë Candy

Sébastien Andres

Olivier Burlet

Inneke Waeyenberghe

#### In Colour

[1.78:1]

#### Distributor

Soda Pictures

A documentary about Antoine Yates, who was arrested in 2003 for reckless endangerment and possession of a wild animal after housing an alligator named Al and a three-year-old Bengal tiger called Ming in his 142nd Street apartment in Harlem, New York. The documentary begins with archival footage of pioneering big-cat trainer Mabel Stark, then moves to present-day Harlem, where Yates, usually seen from the window of a hire car, recounts his life with Ming and Al over images of the area's street corners, playgrounds and supermarkets. In the film's mid-section, a Bengal tiger and alligator roam through rooms that reproduce Yates's apartment; these scenes are silent save for the sounds of the animals and the soundtrack and poetry recitation provided by Icelandic cellist Hildur Gudnadóttir. The film then returns to Yates, who recalls happy days with Ming and the sense of loss he experienced with the tiger's departure.



## Minuscule Valley of the Lost Ants

France/Belgium 2013, Directors: Thomas Szabo, Hélène Giraud, Certificate U 88m 42s

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

This charming, back-to-basics French insect drama is a world away from smart-talking, anthropomorphised animated features like 1998's *A Bug's Life* and *Antz*. Scaled up from the six-minute TV episode adventures, it has stylised CGI insect heroes animated on lush, live-action backgrounds in bosky meadows or wooded mountainsides. There's an obvious debt here to the bug's-eye view of *Micropolis* (2014), but the film's dialogue-free quest, its moods signalled by an orchestrated score and nimble sound effects, has its own robust, cine-literate mix of drama and humour.

As the ladybird and its ant allies try to get a box of sugar back to the colony, bug-packed meadows reverberate like motorways, and a spider's hideout sports a *Psycho*-styled doll's house. A rival red ant army, laying siege to the colony for the sugar, flinches under a *Hero*-style rain of toothpicks. Characterisation is minimal, though buzzes, toots and eye-rolls convey enough emotion for Ladybird and lead ant Mandible to convey a growing friendship.

At 90 minutes, the film is just too long to keep its slender story taut, and the pacing slackens late on for a ladybird-spider detour. Bucking the trend for increasingly slick, knowing or action-crammed animated family features, *Minuscule* is, however, a small delight. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Produced by</b> Philippe Delarue	Nozon – Paris, 2d3D Animations	<b>Minuscule La Vallée des fourmis perdues</b>
<b>Written by</b> Thomas Szabo Hélène Giraud	With the participation of TPS Star	
<b>Director of Photography</b> Dominique Fausset	in association with Cofanim, Backup Films, Le Pacte, Editions Montparnasse, La Wallonie, Pôle Images de Liège, Région Provence Alpes Côtes D'Azur, Département des Alpes-	
<b>Edited by</b> Valérie Chappellet	Maritimes, Région Poitou-Charentes in partnership with the CNC in conjunction with Pôle Image Magelis, Département de la Charente, Angoa-Agicoa	
<b>Production Designer</b> Hélène Giraud		
<b>Music</b> Hervé Lavandier		
<b>Sound Engineer</b> Côme Jalibert		
<b>Animation Director</b> Thomas Monti		
©Futurikon Films, Entre Chien et Loup, Nozon Paris, Nozon SPRL, 2d3D Animations		
<b>Production Companies</b> A Futurikon presentation a Futurikon Films production in co-production with Entre Chien et Loup, Nozon – Belgium,	<b>Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]</b>	
	<b>Distributor</b> Lionsgate UK	
	French theatrical title	

The French Alps, present day. A ladybird with a broken wing hides in a picnic tin of sugar cubes, and befriends the black ants that carry it off. The ladybird's quick thinking thwarts a lizard. The group survive attempts by rival red ants to steal the sugar and are pursued home in a mountainside chase, through river rapids and a waterfall. An army of red ants lays siege to their colony. The ladybird flies on a new wing to get a box of matches from the picnic site, befriendng the spider that has grabbed them, and surviving a toad attack. The ants defeat the invaders with fireworks.

## The Neon Demon

Denmark/France/USA 2016  
Director: Nicolas Winding Refn  
Certificate 18 117m 18s



Fashion victim: Elle Fanning

### Reviewed by Anton Bitel

"You've slept with men before? You do sleep with men, don't you?" Sarah (Abbey Lee) asks Jesse (Elle Fanning) in front of the big mirrors in a swanky nightclub's bathroom.

"All the time," Jesse replies, after too long a pause and with little conviction.

The truth is, Jesse is very much a virgin – a naive girl just arrived in town with nothing but her looks and her youth, fresh meat in the shallow, cut-throat world of modelling. She is sweet 16 but, on the advice of her new agent Roberta (Christina Hendricks), says that she is older, without fooling anyone. She has not had sex yet with her nice boyfriend Dean

(Karl Glusman). And in the industry where, momentarily at least, she has 'that thing', her virginity is her currency, attractive to all precisely for its ephemerality. You can only lose it once – although older, more experienced (and less employable) models such as Sarah and her surgically enhanced friend Gigi (Bella Heathcote) hunger desperately to get theirs back.

Jesse may stay a virgin, but *The Neon Demon*, directed and co-written by Nicolas Winding Refn (*Drive*, *Only God Forgives*), keeps creating images of her deflorator or even rape by monstrous, predatory forces. The film's opening sequence shows her reclining, supine and corpse-like, on a couch, her head thrown back and red fluid

### Credits and Synopsis

<b>Producers</b> Lene Børjolum Sidonie Dumas Vincent Maraval	<b>Music</b> Cliff Martinez	Nation production in association with Vendian Entertainment and Bold Films With the support of Danish Film Institute, MEDIA Programme of the European Union In collaboration with Danish Broadcasting Corporation	Steven Marshall Michel Litvak Gary Michael Walters Jeffrey Stott Manuel Chiche Matthew Read Victor Ho Rachel Dik Thor Sigurjonsson	Ruby	<b>[2.35:1]</b>  <b>Distributor</b> Icon Film Distribution
<b>Screenplay</b> Nicolas Winding Refn Mary Laws Polly Stenham	<b>Sound Design</b> Eddie Simonsen Anne Jensen			Ruby <b>Bella Heathcote</b> Gigi <b>Abbey Lee</b> Sarah <b>Desmond</b> <b>Harrington</b> Jack	
<b>Director of Photography</b> Nataasha Braier	<b>Costume Designer</b> Erin Benach	<b>Cast</b> <b>Elle Fanning</b> Jesse <b>Karl Glusman</b> Dean <b>Jena Malone</b>	<b>Christina Hendricks</b> Roberta Hoffmann <b>Keanu Reeves</b> Hank <b>Charles Baker</b> Mikey		
<b>Editor</b> Matthew Newman	@Space Rocket, Gaumont, Wild Bunch	<b>Executive Producers</b> Christophe Riandee Brahim Chioua Christopher Woodrow Michael Bassick	<b>Dolby Digital</b> In Colour		
<b>Production Designer</b> Elliott Hostetter	<b>Production Companies</b> Wild Bunch, Gaumont, Nicolas Winding Refn present a film by Nicolas Winding Refn A Space Rocket				

Los Angeles, present day. Virginal 16-year-old Jesse has arrived in the city in pursuit of a modelling career. Through makeup artist Ruby, she meets older models Sarah and Gigi. Jesse fakes her parents' consent signature and, on the advice of her agent Roberta, lies about her age. After an evening out with boyfriend Dean, Jesse returns to her motel room to find it trashed by a wildcat. Meeting Jesse for the first time, photographer Jack clears the set and shoots her naked. Upset at being overlooked at an audition where Jesse is noticed, Sarah breaks a bathroom mirror, cuts Jesse's hand and licks the blood. Jesse, delirious, is nursed at the motel by Dean – who also pays off the motel's lecherous manager Hank. Jesse wins a coveted

show-closing catwalk spot over Gigi, and is mesmerised on the runway by her own hallucinatory reflection.

Upset at how much Jesse has become like her shallow modelling colleagues, Dean leaves her. In her room, Jesse has a premonition of being sexually assaulted by Hank, and then wakes to hear him raping her neighbour. Jesse flees to a mansion where Ruby is house-sitting, but rebuffs Ruby's sexual advances. Ruby goes to the mortuary where she works part-time, and has sex with a young woman's corpse. Attacked in the mansion by Ruby, Sarah and Gigi, Jesse falls backwards into the empty swimming pool, leaving her broken and bloody. After devouring Jesse, Sarah and Gigi are given new work with Jack.

## Now You See Me 2

USA 2016  
Director: Jon M. Chu  
Certificate 12A 129m 2s

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

*Now You See Me 2* doesn't have an overabundance of strong images, and most of those that it has are stuffed into the trailer. There is one moment, however, that drew an audible gasp from the small, sedate audience that I saw the film with. Illusionist J. Daniels Atlas (Jesse Eisenberg) walks into his apartment and discovers an admirer, Lula May (Lizzy Caplan), stretched out on his sofa; his entrance puts in motion a chain reaction which the camera follows as she keeps up a line of mindless prattle, and the Heath Robinson set-up ends with a guillotine drop that appears to clip her head clean off, a nifty little trick. The jibber-jabber and the over-elaborate trigger for the guillotine are forms of what magic folk call misdirection, various pieces of business meant to draw attention away from the sleight of hand as it happens. And *Now You See Me 2* is nothing if not a flurry of misdirection, using all manner of hollow brio to distract from the fact that it is a charmless, turgid collection of clichés and missteps.

The decapitation is an audition stunt by Lula, who wants to join the ranks of the Four Horsemen, a group of magician pranksters dedicated to exposing corporate malfeasance, down a member since the 2013 film that enchanted – or at least mildly distracted – audiences everywhere. I didn't see the Louis Leterrier-directed *Now You See Me*, which perhaps means that I am ill equipped to review Jon M. Chu's sequel, though I insist on thinking of movies as freestanding units that should stand or fall on their own merits. Chu, who handled two of the more exuberant *Step Up* films, would seem to be an improvement on Leterrier, but where one of the strengths of the *Step Up* films has been how they wear their history lightly – old members of the dance troupe are always reintroduced with a minimum of fanfare – *Now You See Me 2* buckles under the burden of subplots and callbacks, with always another hidden chamber in the narrative puzzle box, or another man behind the curtain,



City trickers: Woody Harrelson

from Morgan Freeman in cat-that-swallowed-the-canary mode to a plummy Michael Caine.

The very fact that a sequel exists is thanks to an elaborate pre-production contraption that springs into action almost automatically the moment a movie passes a certain threshold of profitability, and much here smacks of the slipshod and stereotyped. The Macau locations and Taiwanese pop star Jay Chou are there for a crack at the Chinese market, and we get that bewhiskered old scene where western and Chinese characters shock each other by speaking one another's languages perfectly. Eisenberg, Mark Ruffalo and Dave Franco respectively provide pipsqueak dyspepsia, mushmouth histrionics and a vacant grin, while Woody Harrelson at least seems to be amusing himself playing a mincing double role that reads like something stipulated for his return in a sequel. It's a follow-up that nobody seems to have passionately wanted, and no amount of razzle-dazzle can distract from the overwhelming sense of listlessness. Time to go into reboot mode! ☹

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Alex Kurtzman  
Roberto Orci  
Bobby Cohen  
**Screenplay**  
Ed Solomon  
**Story**  
Ed Solomon,  
Peter Chiarelli  
Based on characters  
created by Boaz  
Yakin, Edward Ricourt  
**Director of  
Photography**  
Peter Deming  
**Editor**  
Stan Salfas  
**Production Designer**  
Sharon Seymour  
**Costume Designer**  
Anna B. Sheppard  
**Score Composed  
and Conducted by**  
Brian Tyler  
**Sound Design**  
John Marquis  
Nancy Nugent  
**Stunt Co-ordinator**  
Mark Mottram  
  
©Summit  
Entertainment, LLC  
**Production**

**Companies**  
Summit  
Entertainment  
presents a K/O Paper  
Products production  
A Jon M. Chu film  
**Executive Producers**  
Kevin de la Noy  
Louis Leterrier  
Ed Solomon

**Cast**  
Jesse Eisenberg  
J. Daniel Atlas  
Mark Ruffalo  
Dylan Rhodes  
Woody Harrelson  
Merritt McKinney/  
Chase McKinney  
Dave Franco  
Jack Wilder  
Daniel Radcliffe  
Walter Mabry  
Lizzy Caplan  
Lula May  
Jay Chou  
Li  
Sanaa Lathan  
Deputy Director  
Natalie Austin  
Michael Caine  
Arthur Tressler

**Morgan Freeman**  
Thaddeus Bradley  
**Ben Lamb**  
Owen Case

**Dolby Atmos**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
E! Films

New York, present day. A year after outwitting the FBI and gaining public attention with their spectacular magic shows, the 'Four Horsemen' – now down to illusionist Atlas, hypnotist McKinney and card-trick ace Wilder – are laying low, waiting for their overseer Dylan Rhodes to give them news of their next public performance. Rhodes, who is living a double life as an FBI agent charged with capturing the Horsemen, introduces a new member to the group, illusionist Lula May, and sends them to disrupt a product launch by businessman Owen Case. Someone is anticipating their move, however, and Atlas, McKinney, Wilder and May are, by sleight of hand, transported to Macau: Case's former partner Walter Mabry, a tech tycoon who has faked his own death, has kidnapped them with the help of McKinney's twin brother Chase. Mabry coerces them into stealing a new data-mining device from a high-security storage facility. Rhodes tracks the crew to Macau with the help of old nemesis Thaddeus Bradley. Rhodes discovers that Mabry is the illegitimate son of another old enemy, Arthur Tressler. Surviving an attempt on his life, Rhodes reunites with the Horsemen and hatches a plan to lure Mabry, Tressler and Chase to London, where they threaten to expose Mabry's faked death in a series of public performances. Mabry, Tressler and Chase are arrested. Bradley reveals that he has been the Horsemen's benevolent overseer all along.

oozing from her opened neck to the floor. If this is a tableau of post-coital murder, it is also Jesse's first fashion shoot (and first blood) in LA. The vampiric imagery will recur in a later scene: after Jesse cuts herself on the shard of a mirror that Sarah has just broken in a jealous pique, Sarah licks at Jesse's injured hand, smearing blood all over her own lips – as if, like a latter-day Elizabeth Báthory, she can drain Jesse's virginal youth and vitality. When he is introduced to Jesse, the first thing that hip fashion photographer Jack (Desmond Harrington) does is ask her to remove all her clothes.

Meanwhile, back at the cheap Pasadena motel where Jesse is staying, a wildcat somehow gets into her first-floor room and lies growling on her bed (in a subsequent scene and setting, a stuffed leopard decorates the background). The skeezy motel manager Hank (Keanu Reeves, his charismatic good-guy image casually demolished here) regards as easy pickings the young hopefuls and underage runaways who drift into his establishment, and Jesse only manages to avert a vicious sexual assault at his hands (and phallic blade) because of a vivid premonition of his forced break-in. Or does Jesse just dream up all of this?

Indeed, *The Neon Demon* resituates the dreamy film-world fugues of *Mulholland Dr.* (2001) to La La Land's parallel world of fashion. Like Naomi Watts's actress wannabe in Lynch's film, Jesse is gradually absorbed and devoured by the world she is so eager to enter, while her only industry friend, Ruby (Jena Malone), harbours a sapphic interest (this time unrequited) in the ingénue. When Ruby is not applying foundation, lipstick and tinsel to models, she is making up bodies on a mortuary slab, and once her affections for Jesse have been rebuffed, they are immediately transferred to a young blonde's corpse – in a transgressive act that figures the peculiar, frustrating allure of once real breathing women reduced to frigid icons of desire. These tropes from horror (bloodsucking, necrophilia) are here presented as onerous images, or transgressive fashion shoots, culminating in a bloody climax that realises carefully foreshadowed metaphors of anthropophagy and witchcraft – all amid baroquely coloured lighting and visual symmetries that evoke Dario Argento's *Suspiria* (1977) as much as the fashion photography of Helmut Newton or Alice Hawkins.

Refn piles image upon image into a kaleidoscopic film about images that is also a hall (hell, even) of mirrors – with mirrors and reflected figures the film's most obsessively recurrent motif. *The Neon Demon* is a sleek, seductive consumer artefact, its glossy surfaces and pulsing rhythms (courtesy of Refn's regular composer Cliff Martinez) concealing rotten insides and symptoms of mortality – which is, of course, the point. In one central sequence, as Jesse enjoys her first solo saunter on the catwalk, she loses herself in her own image: a demonic alter ego reflected in a triptych of red-lit mirrors that together form a triangular, pubic symbol. If this key moment of intoxicating narcissism is not quite a deflowering, it is the turning point at which Jesse loses her innocence, stops being herself and starts assimilating to the other, older models around her – cannibalised into the (LA) scene. ☹



## Precious Cargo

USA/United Kingdom 2016  
Director: Max Adams  
Certificate 15 90m 17s

### Reviewed by Philip Kemp

"Why do the bad guys always have automatic weapons?" yells a panicky heist-merchant, as bullets spray in every available direction. Well, probably because they're in a dumb-ass movie like this. Screenwriter Max Adams's first directorial feature (expanded from his 2008 short of the same title) regurgitates action-movie clichés from sources as diverse as early James Bond (*From Russia with Love*, 1963) to the *Fast & Furious* franchise.

Here once again we have a bunch of very bad guys, led by Bruce Willis (quite literally phoning in most of his performance and scarcely troubling to hide his lazy contempt) versus a bunch of slightly-less-bad-but-lovable guys for whom we're supposed to be rooting. We get car chases, speedboat chases, endless shootouts in which none of the very bad guys' myriad bullets ever manage to hit their target – and a relentlessly pounding score from James Edward Barker and Tim Despic that at least has the virtue of drowning out much of the cloth-eared dialogue. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Scott Mann  
James Edward Barker  
Randall Emmett  
Norton Herrick  
George Furla

**Written by**  
Max Adams  
Paul Seetachitt

**Director of Photography**  
Brandon Cox

**Editor**  
Robert Dalva

**Production Designer**  
Nate Jones

**Original Score Composed by**  
James Edward Barker

**Sound Mixer**  
Tim Despic

**Richard Schexsnayder**

**Costume Designer**  
Bonnie Stauch

**Stunt Co-ordinator**  
Frank Blake

**©Georgia Film Fund 45, LLC**

**Production Companies**  
Highland Film Group and Emmett Furla

Oasis Films present in association with Herrick Entertainment an Emmett Furla Oasis Films production A Mann Made Films production in association with The Fyzz Facility Supported by the Mississippi Motion Picture Incentive Program

**Executive Producers**  
Steven Saxton

**Producers**  
Ted Fox

**Corey Large**

**Anthony Jabre**

**Vance Owen**

**Mark Stewart**

**Martin Richard**

**Blencowe**

**Benedict Lee**

**Barry Brooker**

**Stan Wertlieb**

**Wayne Marc Godfrey**

**Robert Jones**

**Cast**  
**Mark-Paul Gosselaar**

**Jack**

**Bruce Willis**

**Eddie Filosa**

**Claire Forlani**

**Karen**

**Daniel Bernhardt**

**Simon**

**Nick Loeb**

**Andrew**

**John Brotherton**

**Nicholas**

**Lydia Hull**

**Jenna**

**Sammi Barber**

**Apsara**

**Tyler Jon Olson**

**Lucas**

**Jenna Kelly**

**Logan**

**Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]**

**Distributor**  
Signature Entertainment

The Cayman Islands, present day. Jack, a gunrunner, is contacted by his ex-lover Karen. She has screwed up a heist planned by crime boss Eddie Filosa, who's now threatening to kill her unless she makes good the loss. When she tells Jack that she's pregnant with his child, he agrees to carry out an armoured car robbery for her, despite the misgivings of his regular sidekick, young female sharpshooter Logan. Jack recruits some old associates to help, including the alcoholic Andrew and disastrously married Nicholas. Fending off counterattacks by Eddie's goons, Jack's crew carries off the heist. Jack intercepts a further heist, by Eddie's right-hand man Simon, of \$500m in red diamonds belonging to the CIA. A bid to rescue Karen from the Florida hotel where she's being held culminates in a stand-off on the roof; Eddie is shot dead by Logan. Karen's pregnancy having proved fake, Jack returns to his girlfriend, veterinarian Jenna.

## The Purge Election Year

Director: James De Monaco

### Reviewed by Adam Nayman

Years from now, the titles in the three-entries-and-going-strong *Purge* series will provide fodder for critics to claim that its visions of early 21st century America in thrall to its own most basic instincts constituted a bold attempt at social commentary. Those of us watching the films in real time, however, have a responsibility to report that not all allegories are created equal, and nor are all zeitgeist-surfing genre directors the next George A. Romero. Give James DeMonaco credit for spinning the mildly arresting martial-law-as-social-contract premise of the original *The Purge* (2013) into a franchise with its own mythology and recurring characters, but his success feels fluky. Like so many 'movies of the moment', it's unlikely that *Election Night's* gloating, essentially apolitical inventory of topical maladies will pass the test of time.

DeMonaco's most daring move comes during a pre-credit sequence where a masked home invader narrates his 'purge playlist'; the shift from T-Rex's '20th Century Boy' to a stomping P-Funk track is polyvalently provocative – "That's George Clinton!" he yells – while evoking the pop-criticism-as-psychopathology of *American Psycho*. Any sense that this is going to be a smarter-than-expected thriller dissipates, however, when footage from this subjective flashback is somehow integrated into an onscreen news item about Senator Charlene Roan (Elizabeth Mitchell), whose crusade to cancel her country's annual lethal carnival are rooted in personal trauma and loss.

The slovenliness of the storytelling only gets worse from there, and it's not like anybody involved in the production cares about logic or continuity. The plot, which finds Sergeant Leo (James Grillo), a holdover from *The Purge: Anarchy* (2014), protecting Roan from a troupe of mercenary assassins eager to preserve the status quo, is just an armature for transgressive imagery. DeMonaco doggedly seeks out 'striking' images like the Lincoln Memorial splashed with bloody graffiti, or riot-girls with chainsaws, or a group of willowy vigilantes dancing in languorous circles around a lynching tree,

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Jason Blum  
Michael Bay  
Andrew Form  
Brad Fuller  
Sébastien K. Lemercier  
**Written by**  
James De Monaco

**Director of Photography**  
Jacques Jouffret  
**Editor**  
Todd E. Miller  
**Production Designer**  
Sharon Lomofsky  
**Music**  
Nathan Whitehead

**Costume Designer**  
Elisabeth Vastola

**Production Companies**  
Universal Pictures presents a Platinum Dunes/Blumhouse/Man in a Tree production

**Executive Producers**  
Jeanette Volturmo-Brill  
Couper Samuelson  
Luc Etienne

**Cast**  
**Frank Grillo**

**Leo Barnes**

**Elizabeth Mitchell**

Senator Charlene Roan, 'Charlie'  
**Mykelti Williamson**  
**Edwin Hodge**  
**Betty Gabriel**  
**JJ Soria**  
**Kyle Secor**

**Dolby Digital In Colour**

**[2.35:1]**

**Distributor**  
Universal Pictures International  
UK & Ireland

Washington, the future. Eighteen years after losing her husband and children on Purge Night, liberal senator Charlene Roan is on the verge of being elected president on a platform of cancelling the Purge once and for all. Claiming that the Purge targets the poor and disenfranchised, she rattles the confidence of the New Founding Fathers, who plan to have her killed. Her security detail is compromised by a traitor, but Sergeant Barnes rescues her at the last second and guides her through the city with mercenaries on their trail. They're rescued from a group of axe-wielding vigilantes by Joe, the proprietor of a delicatessen, who

gives them a place to hide out; when Joe's place is attacked, his friend Laney – a former gang-banger – takes out the assailants. Together, the group travels to a protected underground compound, where they learn that revolutionaries are planning to kill Senator Roan's presidential rival, Edwige Owens. Roan is kidnapped and brought to a church to be sacrificed, but Leo and the crew save her. Roan implores the rebels to spare Owens and set an example. Joe is killed during a scuffle, but Roan survives the night and goes on to be elected president, although a newscast suggests that many Americans are unhappy with the result.



Anarchy in the US: *The Purge: Election Year*

but instead of conveying the anything-goes madness of a night without rules, it's just a transparent pile-up of shock effects. It doesn't help that the murky cinematography by Jacques Jouffret keeps swallowing up the characters in between putatively *outré* tableaux).

Grillo is a likeably terse, muscular action-movie presence, and he has a few nice, Kurt Russell-ish badass line readings. But Mitchell's Senator Roan isn't believably charismatic as an agent of potential change, and in lieu of a really great villain – something also absent in the original film – DeMonaco gives us a church filled with pious, lily-white, bloodthirsty evangelicals. Kudos to *Election Night* for taking a couple of pot-shots at the NRA in its script, but the consistently euphoric depiction of violence undermines any real sense of critique, and the deaths of several heavily armed gang-bangers are directly played for rabble-raising laughs. "We are not hypocrites!" bellows one devoted purger while pledging his devotion to the cause; if only these filmmakers could say the same thing. **S**

## The Secret Life of Pets

Director: Chris Renaud  
Certificate U 90m 44s

### Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

Amid the confusing array of computer cartoons, the Illumination studio stands out through its mascots – the yellow-skinned ‘Minions’ from *Despicable Me* (2010), *Despicable Me 2* (2013) and *Minions* (2015). Apart from a post-credits gag, the Minions aren’t in Illumination’s *The Secret Life of Pets*, though they appear in their own raucous short cartoon before the feature (they go gardening).

Directed by the Minions’ co-creator Chris Renaud with Yarrow Cheney, *Pets* is raucous enough in its own right. It’s a shapeless chase comedy in which animals – *Pets* starts with dogs and cats, then throws in everything from a hawk to an alligator – chase each other round Manhattan. The film’s ‘centre’ is supposedly the rivalry between two dogs. A Jack Russell and a hulking Newfoundland, voiced by Louis C.K. and Eric Stonestreet respectively, resent sharing the same owner; the set-up isn’t so different from the first *Toy Story* (1995). However, this strand is nearly buried as more and more animals are introduced. Even the broad joke suggested by the title – that ‘pets’ get up to mischief and anarchy when their owners leave them alone – is buried too, especially when a menagerie of sewer-dwelling abandoned animals appears, led by a shouty rabbit villain voiced by Kevin Hart.

In *Minions*, such a turbulent approach to story worked well. *Pets* hardly puts a paw wrong in its opening minutes, with excellent sight gags (many of which can, admittedly, be seen in the trailers), including a dignified poodle who turns into a headbanging rocker as soon as his owner leaves. There are also sharp lines, such as a bored cat’s philosophy: “As your friend... I don’t care about you or your problems.”

*Pets* looks as spectacular as we’d expect from a 2016 computer cartoon, opening with a lavish flyover of Manhattan, though the final shot is more touching, showing the pets and owners happy in their respective



Party animals: *The Secret Life of Pets*

apartments in a utopian parody of Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954). The animals themselves look pleasingly quirky, deliberately less cute than they’d be in a Disney film.

But while I saw *Pets* with an appreciative audience, I soon found it disappointingly boring. Whereas the Minions – like classic characters such as Bugs and Daffy – were funny no matter what they were doing, the characters in *Pets* don’t have that level of cartoon charisma, and their adventures begin to feel like rote escapades. I preferred the daffier animal antics that punctuated 2012’s *The Lorax*, Illumination’s most disliked film. In particular, the two rivalrous dogs, called Max and Duke, treat each other so nastily in the first act that it’s hard to root for them as either heroes or antiheroes. Dismayingly, the film later tries to persuade us to *care* about the pair. *Minions* would never have bothered with such nonsense, and it was funnier for it. 

### Credits and Synopsis

#### Co-director

Yarrow Cheney

#### Produced by

Chris Meledandri

#### Written by

Janet Healy

#### Paul Cinco

Ken Daurio

#### Brian Lynch

Lighting Supervisor

Thierry Noblet

#### Lead Editor

Ken Schretzmann

#### Production Designer

Eric Guillon

#### Music

Alexandre Desplat

#### Sound Design

David Acord

#### Heads of Character

Animation

Julien Soret

Jonatan del Val

#### Production Companies

Illumination Entertainment and Universal Pictures present

#### Voice Cast

Louis C.K.

Max

Eric Stonestreet

Duke

Kevin Hart

Snowball

Jenny Slate

Gidget

Ellie Kemper

Katie

Lake Bell

Chloe

Dana Carvey

Pops

Hannibal Buress

Buddy

Bobby Moynihan

Mel

Steve Coogan

Ozone

Albert Brooks

Tiberius

Dolby Digital/

DTS/SDS

In Colour

[1.85:1]

#### Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor  
Universal Pictures International  
UK & Ireland

New York, the present. Max, a Jack Russell, is devoted to his owner Katie. Max is outraged when Katie brings home a second dog, a huge Newfoundland called Duke, which she has rescued from the city pound. The dogs soon become enemies. Max uses his cunning to dominate Duke; in response, Duke drags Max into the city, planning to throw him in the trash. They’re both snatched by dogcatchers, but then rescued by a motley gang of abandoned, human-hating animals led by white rabbit Snowball. The dogs try convincing Snowball they killed their owner, but are soon found out.

Meanwhile, Max’s neighbour Gidget, a Pomeranian dog smitten with Max, is alarmed by his disappearance. She assembles a search team consisting of dogs and other creatures, and tracks Max through New

York. By now, Max and Duke are in Brooklyn and have begun to bond. Max persuades Duke to find the house of his former owner, but Duke is distraught to learn the man has died. He’s then snatched by the dogcatchers again. Max is chased by some of Snowball’s gang, but they’re snatched too.

Snowball and Max join forces and race to the rescue, causing the dogcatchers’ van to break through the side of the Brooklyn Bridge. Max is attacked by more of Snowball’s gang (who are unaware of their new alliance) but Gidget and her allies arrive on the scene to save him. Max and Duke fall into the river, but Snowball saves them from drowning. The animals all go home; the pets return to their respective apartments in time to greet their owners coming home from work.

## Summertime

France 2015  
Director: Catherine Corsini  
Certificate 15 105m 23s


### Reviewed by Catherine Wheatley

A sapphic love story set against the backdrop of second-wave feminism, with shades of Agnès Varda’s *Lune chante, l’autre pas* (1977), Catherine Corsini’s *Summertime* attempts to think through the relationship between feminism and queerness, political and personal commitment, but ends up doing all of these concerns a disservice.

Carole is a thirtysomething straight-identifying Spanish teacher and women’s-rights campaigner. Delphine is a twentysomething farmer’s daughter, in Paris to escape the expectation that she will marry and start a family. They are played by two of French-speaking cinema’s most interesting stars: Cécile de France, the Belgian actress who made her name playing lesbian characters in Alexandre Aja’s *High Tension* (2003) and Cédric Klapisch’s *L’Auberge espagnole* (2002), and rock star Izia Higelin, a kind of French Juliette Lewis.

The pair meet as members of an activist feminist cell and a mutual attraction develops between them. For quiet, thoughtful Delphine, growing up lesbian in the conservative Limousin countryside has meant learning to be invisible. She is entranced by urbanite Carole’s overt politicisation. For Carole, meanwhile, Delphine – sprung straight from a land in which women and daughters unquestioningly work without rights or pay – holds an exotic real-world allure. Carole leaves her male partner and the women become lovers. But when Delphine’s father falls ill and Carole follows her back to the farm, the gap between ideals and praxis becomes painfully apparent.

Carole and Delphine are a physically arresting couple: de France all blonde, rangy athleticism, Higelin dark, compact, muscular. Their oppositeness should make them a cliché, but in fact as the power dynamics between them shimmer and shift in the Limousin heat, so too does something in their physical makeup: they seem to blur into one another. It’s an effect reinforced by cinematographer Jeanne Lapoirie’s gorgeous rendering of the late-summer Limousin area, where cornfields bask in saturated afternoon sun or gently heave and settle in the gloaming. Indeed, the film is worth watching for one extraordinarily beautiful sequence set in a barn, the golden light swarming with dancing husks, dust and crop fibres.

Perhaps Corsini’s vision of rural France has been coloured by a fondness for the area close to where she was raised. Evidently, *Summertime* is a very personal work for her, in more ways than one. She conceived the film, her first to confront lesbianism head-on, with her partner and producer Elisabeth Perez (in interviews the pair compare themselves to Delphine and Carole), and describes it as a response to the wave of homophobia that swept through France in the wake of the legalisation of same-sex marriage in 2013. But of course another film is indelibly associated with that moment, and *Summertime* will inevitably suffer from comparisons with Abdellatif Kechiche’s *Blue Is the Warmest Colour*. The penetration scenes between Carole and Delphine might have seemed refreshingly frank four years ago. In the wake of *Blue*’s 



← notoriously graphic sex, however, they are disappointingly dull. Worse, they're *tasteful*.

Ironically – or perhaps appropriately – *Summertime* is a rather conservative affair. Lapoirie's bucolic portrait of Limousin, for example, can't help but recall the countless Pagnol adaptations that have similarly aestheticised Provence, notably Claude Berri's *Jean de Florette* (1986) and *Manon des sources* (1986). And while it's possible that Corsini is attempting to subvert the heritage genre's iconography, just as *Brokeback Mountain* did the western's in 2005, either way the result is a dilution of the very real iniquities faced by women during this period and the back-breaking labour involved in working the land. The lovers' final *Brief Encounter*-style parting on a station platform only strengthens the impression that, despite its best intentions, *Summertime* lacks the courage of its convictions. Ⓢ

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Elisabeth Perez  
**Screenplay/**  
**Dialogue**  
Catherine Corsini  
Laurette Polmans  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Jeanne Lapoirie  
**Editing**  
Frédéric Baillehaiche  
**Art Direction**  
Anna Falguères  
**Original Music**  
Grégoire Hetzel  
**Sound**  
Olivier Mauvezin  
Benoît Hillebrant  
Thomas Gauder  
**Costumes**  
Jürgen Döring

©CHAZ Productions,  
Artémis Productions,  
France 3 Cinéma  
**Production**  
**Companies**  
CHAZ Productions  
present  
A film by Catherine  
Corsini  
A CHAZ Productions  
production  
in co-production with  
France 3 Cinéma and  
Artémis Productions

With the  
participation of  
Canal+, France  
Télévisions and  
OCS - Orange  
Cinéma Séries  
In association with  
Pyramide, Jouror  
Cinéma, Tax Shelter  
Films Funding  
With the support  
of Gouvernement  
Fédéral de Belgique  
In association  
with Indéfims 3,  
Soficinéma 11 and  
Cinéimage 9  
With the support  
of Région Limousin  
In partnership with  
the CNC - Centre  
National du Cinéma  
et de l'Image Animée

**Cast**  
**Cécile de France**  
Carole  
**Izïa Higelin**  
Delphine  
**Noémie Lvovsky**  
Monique  
**Kévin Azais**  
Antoine  
**Benjamin Bellecour**  
Manuel

**Limousin, France, 1970. Farmer's daughter Delphine is dumped by her girlfriend, who is going to be married. Several months later she is living in Paris, where she meets feminist activist Carole. Carole lives with a man, but she falls for Delphine and the pair become lovers.**

When her father falls ill, Delphine is summoned home to run the farm with the help of her mother and neighbouring farmer Antoine, who has long harboured romantic feelings for Delphine. Carole accompanies Delphine, posing as her friend. Antoine catches the pair kissing, but says nothing. Delphine is anxious they will be outed. At a public gathering, she attempts to kiss Antoine to allay suspicions among the local community – but, furious at being used, he pushes her away. The next morning, Delphine's mother catches the girls in bed together, and throws Carole off the farm. Delphine agrees to leave with Carole, but at the train station changes her mind and returns home.

Some time later, Carole is living in Paris with another woman. She receives a letter from Delphine, who tells her that she now manages her own farm in the south of France.

**Lætitia Dosch**  
Adeline

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
Subtitles

**Distributor**  
Curzon Artificial Eye

French theatrical title  
**La Belle Saison**

## Sweet Bean

Japan/France/Germany 2015

Director: Naomi Kawase

Certificate PG 113m 11s



**Mystic connection: Kirin Kiki**

### Reviewed by Jasper Sharp

It is easy to forget what a breath of fresh air Kawase Naomi once seemed within Japanese filmmaking circles when she first emerged, aged just 18, at the turn of the 1990s with a series of highly personal Super 8 diaries and experimental films. The subsequent international recognition for her *Caméra d'Or*-winning feature debut *Suzaku* (1997) trailblazed a path for a new generation of women directors, such as Nishikawa Miwa and Tanada Yuki, who have since established successful commercial careers, slowly eroding the long-entrenched gender imbalance within

the industry. And yet in comparison with these figures, Kawase remains something of a marginal presence in her homeland, her prodigious output (which includes numerous documentaries, shorts and anthology segments alongside her eight features) buoyed instead by European funding and a consistently high Cannes profile. This outsider status can be attributed in part to her decision to base herself far from the industry hub of Tokyo; many of her films, including *Hotaru* (2000), *Shara* (2003) and *The Mourning Forest* (2007), are set in her birthplace, the ancient capital of Nara, while *Nanayo* (2009) and *Still*

### Credits and Synopsis

**Producer**  
Fukushima Koichiro  
Sawada Masa  
Oyama Yoshito  
**Written by**  
[A film by:]  
Kawase Naomi  
Adapted from  
the novel *An* by  
Sukegawa Dorian  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Akiyama Shigeki  
**Editor**  
Tina Baz  
**Production Designer**

Heya Kyoko  
**Original Music**  
David Hadjadj  
**Sound Recordist**  
Mori Eiji  
**Sound Designer**  
Roman Dymny  
**Costume**  
Kobayashi Miwako

©"An" Film  
Production  
Committee/Comme  
des Cinémas/Twenty  
Vision  
**Production**

**Companies**  
Comme des Cinémas,  
Nagoya Broadcasting  
Network, Twenty  
Vision present  
in co-production with  
Aeon Entertainment,  
Kumie, Poplar  
Publishing, Hakuhodo,  
ZDF/Arte, Mam,  
Elephant House,  
The Asahi Shimbun  
Company  
with the support of  
Aide aux Cinémas du  
Monde, Medienboard

Berlin Brandenburg,  
Agency for Cultural  
Affairs Government  
of Japan  
A film by Naomi  
Kawase  
A Comme des  
Cinéma, Kumie  
production  
In co-production  
with Kazumo  
With the participation  
of L'Aide aux Cinémas  
du Monde, Centre  
National du Cinéma  
et de l'image animée,

Ministère des  
Affaires Étrangères  
et du Développement  
International,  
Institut Français

**Cast**  
**Kirin Kiki**  
Tokue Yoshii  
**Nagase Masatoshi**  
Sentaro  
**Uchida Kyara**  
Wakana  
**Asada Miyoko**  
dorayaki shop owner

**Ichihara Etsuko**  
Yoshiko

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
Subtitles

**Distributor**  
Eureka Entertainment

Japanese  
theatrical title  
**An**

Tokyo, present day. Sentaro manages a small café cooking and selling 'dorayaki', a traditional pancake filled with sweet-bean paste. One morning, 76-year-old Tokue asks about a vacancy for a kitchen assistant. Sentaro tries to deter her but she keeps coming back until he relents. She is shocked to learn that he uses a pre-prepared sweet-bean paste and teaches him how to make it from scratch. The locals are soon flocking to taste the improved 'dorayaki'. Wakana, a teenager with home troubles, finds solace in the company of Sentaro and Tokue, who are themselves developing a rapport. The café's owner informs Sentaro of rumours that Tokue lives in a sanatorium

for lepers. Without warning, Sentaro receives a letter from Tokue offering her resignation. Wakana and Sentaro go to visit her at the leprosarium, where they meet her friend Yoshiko. That evening, Sentaro writes to Tokue, telling her of his own sense of alienation after serving a three-year prison sentence. The café's owner reveals that her nephew will be taking over as manager. Wakana and Sentaro pay another visit to the sanatorium, and learn that Tokue has died. Yoshiko gives Sentaro a pan, sieve and audiocassette message bequeathed to him by Tokue. The following spring, Sentaro is seen selling his 'dorayaki' from a stall beneath the cherry blossoms.

## Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles Out of the Shadows

USA 2016  
Director: Dave Green  
Certificate 12A 111m 58s

### Reviewed by Kim Newman

Just about the only memorable things about the *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II* (1991) were the silly subtitle 'The Secret of the Ooze' and the instantly dating presence of white rapper Vanilla Ice in a gratuitous cameo. It shows a depth of commitment to the ongoing franchise that this direct sequel to the Turtles' 2014 live-action reboot brings back the ooze (though its secret is different) and even includes a snatch of Vanilla Ice in its eclectic pick-and-mix soundtrack.

Even though it is the sixth theatrical *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle* outing, the new film draws on characters popular in other iterations of the franchise, who only now make their big-screen debuts. The thugs-turned-mutants Bebop (a warthog with a purple Mohawk and 80s shades) and Rocksteady (an Irish rhino named after a reggae subgenre) are more comic foils than serious threats, which means that the scene-stealing big bad of this entry is extra-dimensional warlord Krang (named after a *Sub-Mariner* foe from Marvel Comics). Gruesomely well realised in 3D CGI, Krang is a fanged, pop-eyed, tentacular brain who mostly lives inside the torso of a clanking giant robot and seems like a kiddie-matinee nightmare inspired by memories of Frank Henenlotter's *Basket Case* (1982).

Directed by Dave Green (*Earth to Echo*), this moves at a better pace than Jonathan Liebesman's 2014 film and takes care to individuate its colour-coded, one-dominant-character-trait-apiece heroes. Most movies in the franchise stumble over the foursome's sameyness, but this plays up their Fantastic Four-like differences and clashes. A split arises over whether to use the ooze to become human and come out of the shadows (actually, out of the sewers) to live 'normal lives': the film holds back on a full-on turtle-to-human transformation, but we see a cartoonish three-fingered hand growing extra digits.

It's a big, simple story with characters despatched on a variety of missions – to thwart or effect a theft or rescue – that lead to kinetic



Shell's kitchen: *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*

action scenes involving jumping out of planes ("What would Vin Diesel do?" the hesitant Raphael asks himself), breaking into police headquarters or an evil science lair, failing to thwart a mobile jailbreak in a sequence modelled on *The Dark Knight*, or confronting Krang in a self-assembling Death Star knock-off above crowds of worshipful New Yorkers.

Stephen Amell, the brooding lead of TV's *Arrow*, replaces Eleas Koteas as the hockey-themed comedy vigilante Casey Jones and sensibly keeps his head down while the defter Will Arnett does the real comic relief (including a neat office-chair gag). Megan Fox is gamely back for another turn as the turtles' Lois Lane figure, reporter April O'Neil (finding an excuse to dress as a fetish schoolgirl in an early scene). The turtles' slightly disturbing crush on her is wisely downplayed (especially since, in this iteration of the characters, she's their surrogate mother as well as fantasy girlfriend). There are token personal stories, with Casey and the turtles both earning the respect of another mother figure, Laura Linney's police chief, and coming out of the shadows to take their bows. But the main attraction is breezy thrills and superheroic spoofery. Given that none of the previous big-screen turtle films – including CGI toon *TMNT* (2007) – has been much cop, this modestly entertaining, well-assembled 3D kid-pleaser rates as the franchise's best cinema outing to date. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Michael Bay  
Andrew Form  
**Brad Fuller**  
Galen Walker  
Scott Mednick  
**Written by**  
Josh Appelbaum  
André Nemec  
Based on the Teenage  
Mutant Ninja Turtles  
characters created  
by Peter Laird,  
Kevin Eastman  
**Director of  
Photography**

**Lula Carvalho**  
**Film Editors**  
Jim May  
Debra Neil-Fisher  
Bob Ducsay  
**Production Designer**  
Martin Laing  
**Music**  
Steve Jablonsky  
**Supervising  
Sound Editors**  
Jason W. Jennings  
Nancy Nugent Title  
**Costume Designer**  
Sarah Edwards  
**Stunt Co-ordinator**

**Jonathan Eusebio**  
**Visual Effects  
and Animation**  
Industrial Light  
& Magic  
  
©Paramount Pictures  
Corporation  
**Production  
Companies**  
A Platinum Dunes  
production  
A Gama  
Entertainment/  
Mednick Production/  
Smithrowe

Entertainment  
production  
**Executive Producers**  
Denis L. Stewart  
Grant Curtis  
Eric Crown  
Napoleon Smith III  
Josh Appelbaum  
André Nemec

**Cast**  
**Megan Fox**  
April O'Neil  
**Will Arnett**  
Vernon Fenwick, 'Vern'

**Laura Linney**  
Chief Rebecca Vincent  
**Stephen Amell**  
Casey Jones  
**Noel Fisher**  
Michelangelo  
**Jeremy Howard**  
Donatello  
**Pete Ploszek**  
Leonardo  
**Alan Ritchson**  
Raphael  
**Tyler Perry**  
Baxter Stockman  
**Gary Anthony  
Williams**

Bebop  
**Brian Tee**  
Shredder  
**Sheamus**  
Rocksteady

**Dolby Atmos**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Some screenings  
presented in 3D**

**Distributor**  
Paramount  
Pictures UK

**New York, present day.** Fearing that humanity will view them as monsters if they appear in public, mutant turtles Leonardo, Raphael, Donatello and Michelangelo let cameraman Vern Fenwick take the credit for saving the city from rogue ninja Shredder. Reporter April O'Neil, the turtles' ally, warns them that scientist Baxter Stockman is in league with Shredder. The turtles are unable to stop Stockman rescuing the captured villain. Prison officer Casey Jones tracks down Bebop and Rocksteady, crooks who escape with Shredder and are mutated into warthog and rhino creatures to serve as minions. Stockman and Shredder assemble a device that can

bring Commander Krang, a conqueror from another dimension, to Earth. The turtles fall out when Leonardo tries to keep secret the fact that Shredder's mutagen could turn them into humans, but they band together with April, Casey and Vern when Krang assembles a war machine above the city. Krang refuses to share the planet with Shredder, adding the ninja to his collection of frozen victims. The turtles reveal their existence to police chief Rebecca Vincent; they thwart Krang by destroying his war machine while Casey, April and Vern smash Shredder's dimensional rift generator. In recognition of their triumph, the turtles are given the keys to the city.

the *Water* (2014) unfold in exotic locales further afield, in Thailand and Okinawa respectively.

It seems fitting then that Kawase's first film to be set in Tokyo (or rather its suburbs) should deal with those on the margins. Sentaro (Nagase Masatoshi, best known in the west for Fridrik Thor Fridriksson's *Cold Fever* and Jim Jarmusch's *Mystery Train*), a dispirited vendor of *dorayaki* pancakes, merely goes through the motions every day, turning up to work in order to pay off debts (incurred by a past misdemeanour) to the owners of the tiny patisserie he manages. Tokue (the Kore-eda regular Kirin Kiki, seen earlier this year in *Our Little Sister*), the mysterious 76-year-old woman he reluctantly takes on as his kitchen assistant, her passion inspiring a new sense of pride and purpose in his work, is soon revealed to be a resident of a nearby sanatorium for sufferers of Hansen's disease, or leprosy. Meanwhile Wakana, a schoolgirl from a broken family, finds a home from home within the new Gemeinschaft that develops around the older woman's artisanal recipe for the pancake's *an* sweet-bean filling, honed over 50 years of domestic cooking.

Limiting the focus to these three characters works in the drama's favour, certainly when compared with the typically meandering meditations on love, death and extended family life in Kawase's previous work. And there are none of the nakedly autobiographical elements that have proved such a sticking point for viewers resistant to Kawase's rather self-conscious, self-orientalising strain of auteurism. These shifts in tone are best attributed to the fact that she is, unusually, adapting someone else's work rather than developing an original story: the source material is the novel *An* by Sukegawa Durian, which deals with the very real but otherwise almost invisible issue of the outsider status of the several thousand leprosy patients currently housed in specialist sanatoriums across Japan. (Previous films broaching the subject include Toyoda Shiro's *Spring on Leper's Island*, 1940, Nomura Yoshitaro's *The Castle of Sand*, 1974, and Kumai Kei's *To Love*, 1997.)

For viewers unfamiliar with Kawase's oeuvre, *Sweet Bean* provides a better entry point than its laboured predecessor, *Still the Water*, which last year became her first to receive UK distribution. Despite its more sentimental tone, aesthetically the new film adheres closely to the template she established at the beginning of her career, with the phases of the protagonists' shifting relationships relayed as impressionist fragments of everyday life against the changing seasons. The low-key documentary naturalism is well served by Akiyama Shigeki's lucid cinematography, and the montage that plays out as Sentaro reads Tokue's letter of farewell, expressing the old woman's nativist connection to the earth, harks back to the lyrical visual poetry of Kawase's early 8mm work – notably the touching portrait of the great aunt who raised her, *Katatumori* (1994). But the director's characteristically mawkish dialogue in the accompanying voiceover, waxing in quasi-mystical terms about the adzuki bean's rite of passage from field to kitchen or "the soul of a *dorayaki*", may leave some viewers wishing that the centre of this latest confection were a little less cloying. **S**



## Top Cat Begins

Mexico/India 2015  
Director: Andrés Couturier  
Certificate U 89m 36s

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

Shrill, pointlessly frenetic and boasting shiny, bulbous CGI animation, this Mexican-Indian co-produced animated feature (a sequel to the forgettable *Top Cat: The Movie*) cheerfully traduces the memory of the 1961-62 Hanna-Barbera TV cartoon. No more the gentle Sergeant Bilko-styled scams and sly gang interplay of trickster, innocent, dullard, gambler, beatnik and ladies' man/cat (Fancy-Fancy, nimbly modelled on Cary Grant). Instead, a hectic, zigzagging plot flogs a jaded Top Cat through narrative hoops after he pilfers stolen jewels from a crime boss. The gang, barely differentiated, are bolted into the story midway, but only the guileless Benny ("I thought I had a pet cat. Then I found out it was me") has any active role in the story.

Jason Harris's shouty, hectoring voice work as Top Cat retains the trademark Phil Silvers intonation, but the snappy exchanges that were the show's trademark have become traded insults. Garish animation, in a palette of boiled-sweet brightness, adds to the overall loudness. For a U-certificate film it also has an oddly violent feel – guns, bullets, loud threats and kitchen choppers are much in evidence.

"Provided it's with dig-nit-y" was Top Cat's theme-tune motto once upon a time.

No chance of that here. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Fernando de Fuentes S.  
Jose C. García de Letona  
**Screenplay**  
Jim Krieg  
Doug Langdale  
Jorge Ramírez-Suárez  
Based on the characters created by Hanna-Barbera Productions, Inc.  
**Editor**  
Patrick Danse  
**Art Director**  
Rafael González  
**Composer**  
Leoncio Lara Bon  
**Sound Designer**  
Alejandro de Icaza  
**Animation Director**  
Samuel Arturo Rico Vázquez

©Ánima Estudios S.A.P.I. de C.V.  
**Production Companies**  
Ánima Estudios presents in co-production with Discreet Art Productions  
Made with the support of Fiscal del

Artículo 226/189 de la LISR (Eficine), Fondo de Inversión y Estímulos al Cine (Fidecine) México  
**Executive Producers**  
Fernando de Fuentes S.  
Jose C. García de Letona  
Mariana Suárez Molnar  
Vishal Dudgea Srikanth Pottekkula

**Voice Cast**  
English-language version  
**Jason Harris**  
Top Cat/Choo-Choo/Brain  
**Chris Edgerly**  
Benny the Ball  
**Bill Lobley**  
Officer Dibble  
**Matthew Piazzi**  
Fancy-Fancy  
**Marieeve Herington**  
Panther  
**Ben Diskin**  
Spook  
**David Hoffman**  
Granny Dibble  
**Darin De Paul**  
Mr Big

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)

**US, present day.** Top Cat and Benny snaffle the diamonds stolen by local crime boss and club owner Mr Big. Officer Dibble hides the pair in the suburbs. Cats Fancy-Fancy, Choo Choo and Brain join the gang, fighting the thugs who track them down. Back in the city, Benny's mother has sold the hidden diamonds to Mr Big's club singer by mistake. Benny goes undercover to retrieve them. Top Cat enlists pizza-delivery boy Spook and a vigilante gang, and rescues Benny and the diamonds. Reluctantly, Top Cat donates the diamonds to save a local orphanage.

## Up for Love

France/USA/Belgium 2016  
Director: Laurent Tirard  
Certificate 12A 98m 13s

### Reviewed by Sue Harris

The opening ten minutes of this romcom-with-a-twist (but isn't there always a twist?) are captivating in an old-school way. Diane, a professional singleton 'up for love', is a striking blonde beauty who literally turns heads as she strides through the city in the title sequence.

Virginie Efira is a consummate screwball leading lady: alone in her apartment, with a bath running, she jousts on the phone with two very different male suitors who repeatedly call and interrupt her peace. The first is the angry, pleading ex she has just dumped in a restaurant, and the other is the suave, velvet-voiced stranger who has picked up her lost mobile phone and wants to meet to return it. The pacing and repartee here are lovely, Efira modifying her tone and mood with each shrill ring on the landline: she alternates between stubborn and exasperated with the rejected Bruno, and between coy and flirtatious with the seductive Alexandre, throwing in elements of ditzy as the bath inevitably overruns, flooding her sitting room. With the dreamy Jean Dujardin cast as the film's romantic lead, we are quickly primed for a classic tale of modern courtship between a sassy independent woman and an old-fashioned charmer with film-star looks.

But from the minute we meet Alexandre, the film veers into dodgy territory and never recovers. The conceit of the mismatched couple in this case is that Alexandre is revealed to be a dwarf, a perfect but tiny man with the stature of a child. As Dujardin is in fact quite tall, his miniaturisation is achieved by CGI, knocking 15 inches off in one fell swoop. The special-effects budget was clearly huge, but its deployment is seriously clunky: the use of green screen is horribly apparent throughout, with problems of inconsistency of proportion, scale and elongation in almost every scene in which Dujardin appears. The running gag of the little man being knocked to the floor by his son's massive dog each time he comes through the front door quickly becomes old, as does the need to make every woman as tall and thin as possible

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Vanessa Van Zuylen  
Sidonie Dumas  
**Screenplay, Adaptation and Dialogue**  
Laurent Tirard  
Grégoire Vigneron  
Based on the film *Corazón de León* [2013] written and directed by Marcos Carnevale  
**Director of Photography**

Jérôme Almérás  
**Editor**  
Valérie Deseigne  
**Art Director**  
Françoise Dupertuis  
**Original Music**  
Éric Neveux  
**Original Songs**  
Emilie Gassin  
**Sound**  
Eric Devulder  
François Fayard  
Thomas Gauder  
**Costume Designer**  
Valérie Artiges-Corno

©VVZ Production, Gaumont, M6 Films  
**Production Companies**  
Gaumont present  
Vanessa Van Zuylen and Sidonie Dumas present  
A VVZ Production, Gaumont, M6 Films co-production in co-production with Saint Sébastien Froissart, Creative Andina, Scope

Pictures, Matthias Ehrenberg with the participation of Canal+, M6, Ciné+, Région Provence-Alpes-Côte d'Azur in partnership with the CNC  
A film by Laurent Tirard  
With the support of Tax Shelter du Gouvernement fédéral belge via Scope Invest

**Cast**  
**Jean Dujardin**  
Alexandre  
**Virginie Efira**  
Diane Duchêne  
**Cédric Kahn**  
Bruno Cassoni  
**Manoëlle Gaillard**  
Nicole  
**César Domboy**  
Benji  
**Stéphanie Papanian**  
Coralie  
**In Colour**

**[2.35:1] Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Soda Pictures

French theatrical title  
**Un homme à la hauteur**

**France, the present.** Diane, a lawyer, receives a phone call from a charming and mysterious stranger called Alexandre. He tells her that he picked up her mobile phone when she left a restaurant following an argument with Bruno, her ex-husband. Diane finds herself attracted to the flirtatious, deep-voiced Alexandre and agrees to meet him. However, she is discomfited to discover that he is a dwarf, only 4ft 5in tall. Alexandre is a rich and successful architect with an extensive and

chic social circle, and Diane finds his company exciting and rewarding but is unable to deal with the judgement and ridicule of others, including her secretary, mother and Bruno. After numerous awkward social trials, Diane breaks off the relationship, but eventually realises that she loves Alexandre and wants to be with him. To prove her lack of fear about what lies ahead for them, she parachutes on to the roof of the opera house, where he is in a project meeting. They are reconciled.



Little big man: Virginie Efira, Jean Dujardin

## Warcraft The Beginning

USA/Japan 2016  
Director: Duncan Jones  
Certificate 12A 122m 57s

### Reviewed by Kim Newman


In the late 60s and early 70s it took a string of expensive disasters, including *Star!*, *Hello, Dolly!* and *Lost Horizon*, to end the vogue for big-budget musicals. In 1980 *Heaven's Gate* killed the western for a generation. Films based on computer games have invariably been disappointing-to-disastrous ever since *Super Mario Bros* (1993), yet studios insist on greenlighting them with wide-eyed optimism, in the same way that the Coyote relies on the products of the Acme Company – usually with similar explosive blowback. Games have informed an array of interesting films, from *Groundhog Day* (1993) to *Scott Pilgrim vs the World* (2010), but the movies associated with such huge franchises as *Doom*, *Silent Hill*, *Street Fighter*, *Hitman*, *Tomb Raider* and *Prince of Persia* have made little impact (though a few have earned even more disappointing sequels). In this field, only Paul W.S. Anderson, with *Mortal Kombat* and the *Resident Evil* series, has shown any kind of knack for making films out of pre-sold yet problematic material.

Duncan Jones, whose *Moon* (2009) and *Source Code* (2011) made interesting use of the die-and-try-again game format, is more ambitious than Anderson (or Anderson's malformed evil twin Uwe Boll), but this prequel to the *Warcraft* franchise – which exists famously as a multiplayer online role-playing game but also manifests as everything from a collectable card game to a pit-your-wits-against-a-computer-controlled-army war game – is a crowded, flavourless muddle likely to frustrate enthusiasts and newcomers alike.

A persistent problem in game-based movies is that game backdrops set out to be generic – drawing on books, films and comics to create bland, consensus-based genre worlds. The fantasy *Warcraft* realm of

Azeroth isn't even warmed-over Tolkien or Robert E. Howard, but a pick-and-mix from previous games that take their tone from mock-medieval sword-and-sorcery adventures, and the online game is influenced by such tabletop scenarios as *Dungeons & Dragons* (which has had its own dire film spin-offs) and *Warhammer*. Jones's movie feels like a shout-back to knock-offs such as *Krull* (1983) or *Eragon* (2006) – or Terry Pratchett's *Discworld* with all the jokes surgically removed.

In contrast to the black-and-white moralities of much high fantasy, Jones tries to spread the complexity around. The Viking-like orcs (tusked berserker hulks), displaced by magical climate change, have a sense of honour and family loyalty. The human wizard who's to blame for the war isn't a simple villain but corrupted by overuse of bad spells: Ben Foster even seems to be carrying over some of his Lance Armstrong as a mage relying on black – or, as depicted here, green – magic, even though it eats away at his heroic status. The kingdoms, briefly introduced, are riven with political differences that seem minor compared with the full-on guignol soap of *Game of Thrones*. There's even a touch of historical awareness in a subplot about the rise of technology, as wielders of swords and spells become less fearsome because some dwarves have just invented firearms.

As a set-up story for a saga of unending war, *Warcraft* introduces a lot of characters and scenarios – and sacrifices several of them to generate ongoing conflicts and narrative threads. In effect, this is about putting the pieces on the board. There are a few moments of decent fantasy action, including a battle with a golem atop a magic tower, and Paula Patton heroically snarls dialogue through cute orc tusks – but this seems unlikely to break the curse on game-to-film transfers. 



### Warcraft: The Beginning

#### Credits and Synopsis

##### Produced by

Charles Roven  
Thomas Tull  
Jon Jashni  
Alex Gartner  
Stuart Fenegan  
**Written by**  
Charles Leavitt  
Duncan Jones  
Based on Blizzard  
Entertainment's  
*Warcraft*  
**Director of  
Photography**  
Simon Duggan  
**Edited by**  
Paul Hirsch

##### Production Designer

Gavin Bouquet  
**Music**  
Ramin Djawadi  
**Supervising  
Sound Editors**  
Wylie Stateman  
Tom Bellfort  
**Costume Designer**  
Mayes C. Rubeo  
**Visual Effects and  
Animation by**  
Industrial Light  
& Magic  
**Fight Co-ordinators**  
John Street  
Roger Yuan

##### Stunt Co-ordinator

Tom Struthers  
  
@Legendary and  
Universal Studios  
**Production  
Companies**  
Legendary Pictures  
and Universal  
Pictures present  
A Legendary  
Pictures, Blizzard  
Entertainment,  
Atlas Entertainment  
production  
Presented in  
association With

Dentsu Inc./  
Fuji Television  
Network, Inc.  
**Executive Producers**  
Jillian Share  
Brent O'Connor  
Mike Morhaime  
Paul Sams  
La Peikang  
Edward Cheng  
Qian Shimu  
Wang Zhonglei

##### Cast

Travis Fimmel  
Commander

Anduin Lothar  
**Paula Patton**  
Garona  
**Ben Foster**  
Medivh  
**Dominic Cooper**  
King Llane Wrynn  
**Toby Kebbell**  
Durotan  
**Ben Schnetzer**  
Khadgar  
**Rob Kazinsky**  
Ogrim  
**Daniel Wu**  
Gul'dan

Dolby Atmos/DTS X

##### In Colour

Prints by  
Fotokem  
[2.35:1]

Some screenings  
presented in 3D

**Distributor**  
Universal Pictures  
International  
UK & Ire

The orc world is dying. Gul'dan, an orc wizard, uses the Fel (evil magic) to establish a portal to Azeroth, a world of humans whose wizard protector Medivh has been corrupted by the Fel and has invited an orc invasion. Sir Anduin Lothar is sent by King Llane Wrynn of Stormwind to investigate the orc raids. After clashing with the orc Frostwolf clan commanded by Durotan, Lothar captures half-human/half-orc slave Garona and learns from her that Gul'dan intends to sacrifice many human captives to maintain the portal and bring the orc horde to Azeroth. Khadgar, a young

mage, begins to suspect Medivh's part in starting the war and sets out to undo the Fel and close the portal. When Durotan realises that the Fel was responsible for destroying his world, and that its use in Azeroth will render it uninhabitable too, he negotiates with Lothar to avert total war. However, Gul'dan uses the Fel to kill Durotan in a duel. Khadgar and Lothar battle Medivh, who dies – closing the portal. In battle, Llane asks Garona to kill him so that she can gain influence among the orcs and possibly end the war. Go'el, Durotan's infant son, is discovered by humans.

## Weiner

USA 2016  
Directors: Josh Kriegman, Elyse Steinberg  
Certificate 15 96m 2s

### Reviewed by Leigh Singer

If Anthony Weiner hadn't existed, political satirists would have had to make him up: a rising congressman whose name is, of course, US slang for male genitalia, embroiled in a sexting scandal after sending images of his own bulging underpants; a Jewish politician married to the Asian-American right-hand adviser to the most powerful woman in US politics; a comeback candidate running for mayor of New York City, wife dutifully standing by her man, the campaign seemingly working like gangbusters – until another sexting scandal erupts... The likes of Aaron Sorkin or Armando Iannucci and their teams on *The West Wing* or *Veep* would surely congratulate themselves for such on-point skewering of personal and political hubris. Although even they might have considered Weiner's genuine online pseudonym – 'Carlos Danger' – a comic conceit a little too over-the-top.

The facts of the case are outlandish enough, but what's even more eye-opening is that so much of it has been documented in real time by directors Josh Kriegman and Elyse Steinberg. In an information age in which immediacy trumps all else – grainy CCTV and shaky camera-phone footage are now established visual sources for major news networks – it's disconcerting to have such ostensibly composed and professional-looking reporting embedded here. When the second scandal breaks, Kriegman's camera smoothly follows bewildered campaign staff at Weiner's HQ as they try to take in the revelations unfolding on their TV screens. We're right beside a neatly framed Weiner and wife Huma Abedin as he attempts to manage both the wider fallout and her deepening hurt and fury at the latest crisis. It's some coup.

Kriegman's unparalleled access is largely down to his previous role as Weiner's New York chief of staff, which is presumably what allowed him to stay up close and personal once the original plans of documenting a potential political comeback have derailed so spectacularly. As an exposé of today's 24-hour news blitz, with its rush to judgement, addiction to instant soundbites and endless speculation, the film is more filibuster than visionary radical. Indeed, one could argue that it risks complicity, especially when granting so much narrative weight to the climactic subplot of Weiner's former sexting partner Sydney Leathers and her opportunistic election-night sting. At what point does offering a similar ratio of tabloid sensationalism to genuine political discourse make a documentary complicit in the very type of coverage it tacitly denounces?

Yet one can't deny that the film shoots its barrel-bound fish with great gusto. Editor Eli Despres (*Blackfish*) navigates smart changes of pace, juxtaposing the kinetic energy of Weiner in his man-of-the-people element at a street parade with the tumbleweed reception for rival mayoral candidate (and eventual winner) Bill de Blasio. It's also highly attuned to prolonged, discomfiting spaces and excruciating silences outside the rhetoric, notably Abedin's clenched body language and collection of remarkably eloquent stares and eye-rolls.

While Abedin is clearly enduring the cameras under duress, Weiner is most





**Showboating: Anthony Weiner**

definitely not. A slick early montage establishing his rapid rise up the Democrat ranks presents a showboating politician who relishes – perhaps even needs – the spotlight. The directors have been at pains to stress their non-judgemental stance but, frankly, Weiner is keen to play all parts here anyway: his own judge, jury, cheerleader, even nemesis.

This means that for all his intermittent self-flagellation, Weiner's vaulting ambition and his seeming inability to rein in self-destructive tendencies are allowed to run the show. It makes for a vastly entertaining character study but not necessarily an enlightening one. Keeping Weiner centre stage at the expense of dedicated interviews with other principal players somewhat maroons viewers in his blinkered vantage point. Kriegman's occasional off-camera direct questions are easily batted away. For some, this will be a flaw of the film, rather than of its protagonist. Yet end-credits footage, showing Weiner to be still a charismatic if slightly more chastened fixture on the media circuit, reveals a wholly political animal, impervious to dissection, impossible to fully cage. **S**

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Josh Kriegman  
Elyse Steinberg  
**Written by**  
Josh Kriegman  
Elyse Steinberg  
Eli Despres  
**Cinematography**  
Josh Kriegman  
**Edited by**  
Eli Despres  
**Music**  
Jeff Beal  
**Supervising  
Sound Editor/  
Re-recording Mixer**  
Tom Paul

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**Production  
Companies**

An Edgeline Films  
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in association with  
Motto Pictures  
Supported by a  
grant from Catapult  
Film Fund, The  
TFI Documentary  
Fund, presented  
by The Orchard  
Supported by  
TFI/A&E Indiefilms  
Storylab, a grant  
from Jenerosity  
Foundation, a  
grant from The  
Sundance Institute  
Documentary  
Film Program  
With support from  
Open Society

Foundations, Ford  
Foundation Justfilms  
**Executive  
Producers**  
Lily Fan  
Julie Goldman  
Christopher  
Clements  
Carolyn Hepburn

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]

**Distributor**  
Dogwoof

A documentary about Anthony Weiner, a hotly tipped Democrat congressman from New York who is forced to resign in 2011 following a sexting scandal. Two years later, he runs for New York mayor, supported by his wife Huma Abedin, an aide to Hillary Clinton. Initially he does well in the polls, but his campaign is rocked by revelations of more sexting incidents. On election night, he narrowly avoids a staged meeting with Sydney Leathers, a 22-year-old with whom he engaged in sexting. He loses the mayoral election heavily.

## Where You're Meant to Be

United Kingdom 2016  
Director: Paul Fegan  
Certificate 15 76m 23s

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

It's not explicitly referenced in the film, but clearly the whole independence debate has seen Scotland taking renewed stock of its cultural heritage. She's since passed away, but here carrying the flame for traditional balladry is Sheila Stewart, a revered figure on the Scottish folk scene, who makes a point of commenting that while Scotland is known abroad for tartan, the kilt and shortbread, its real national treasure is the body of songs passed down through generations, the way she learned them as a little girl. But is this legacy something that's purely static and unchanging? Enter indie musician Aidan Moffat, who loves the strong emotions of these ancient tunes but has taken upon himself the task of modernising the lyrics so that they speak anew to a wider audience.

Paul Fegan's wry, smartly shot and ultimately touching documentary follows Moffat as he takes this revisionist material on a Scottish tour that starts in the Highlands and Islands and then tracks back towards the central belt. Moffat's body of work, which is noted for its slangy, often sexually explicit lyrics, and which includes a decade of albums with the band Arab Strap, has won him a dedicated following among indie fans – and a certain indelible celluloid moment when Tran Anh Hung used the band's song 'Soaps' for an evocative early-morning reverie in *At the Height of Summer* (2000). But how will a rural crowd perhaps unaware of these past exploits take to his confrontational approach to traditional song? First off, Moffat seeks the blessing of Stewart herself, an encounter obviously set up for the purposes of the film but an effective chastener nevertheless, since she's utterly horrified by what he's doing to the songs that are part of her lifeblood; she complains, for instance, that he simply hasn't taken the time to understand the elegiac religious significance of her signature ballad 'The Parting Glass'.

When Moffat and band's opening gig on the Isle of Lewis proves fairly disastrous, one does begin to wonder if Stewart's misgivings are well founded. As the tour progresses, Fegan shows a keen eye for the little absurdities of the local flora and fauna – one islander keeps his dog in a roadside phone box to stop it annoying the traffic, another gig follows a

### Credits and Synopsis

**Produced by**  
Paul Fegan  
**Written by**  
David Arthur  
Paul Fegan  
**Cinematography**  
Julian Schwanitz  
**Edited by**  
David Arthur  
**Original Score**  
Stevie Jones  
Jenny Reeve  
Michael John  
McCarthy  
**Sound Editor**  
William Aikman

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Production Ltd  
**Production  
Companies**

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production in  
association with  
Creative Scotland  
and Scottish  
Documentary  
Institute  
Executive producer:  
422 TV  
Commissioned as  
part of the Glasgow  
2014 Cultural  
Programme  
Supported by the  
National Lottery  
through Creative  
Scotland  
**Executive Producers**  
Mark Thomas  
Stewart Henderson  
Sonja Henrici

Noé Mendelle

**narration by**  
Aidan Moffat

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]

**Distributor**  
Better Days



**Moderniser: Aidan Moffat**

historical reenactment where Moffat dons chain mail and tunic for the slightly eccentric host – but the whole trajectory is dramatically inhibited by the fact that Moffat and Stewart spend so very little screen time together.

That said, the film is still fairly nimble in marshalling sundry older folk, among them unimpressed audience members and silver-haired balladeers, to illustrate the divide between the generations; this is most poignantly expressed in an afternoon with a widowed elderly farmer and the struggle to find a song they can all share that will give him a moment of comfort. Moffat's sarky humour and ribald song craft (sample line: "Come back, bonny lassie, your boyfriend's shite") are a delight throughout, making this a rollicking entertainment deftly touching on significant cultural issues. And if the reconciliation afforded by the final night's gig at Glasgow's musical shrine Barrowlands is somewhat predictable, it's no less affecting in its suggestion that the divide between ancient and modern can be bridged when deep-rooted tradition proves stronger than passing musical taste. A lovely film, to be savoured by dyed-in-the-wool folkies and hipster indie kids alike. **S**

A documentary following Scottish indie musician Aidan Moffat as he tours Scotland in 2014 to perform his versions of traditional Scottish ballads, presented with his own new lyrics. Moffat's writing style, exemplified in his work with the now defunct band Arab Strap, is very urban and often sexually explicit, and he worries how new audiences will react. He consults Sheila Stewart, a venerated balladeer in her seventies, who is horrified at the liberties he's taking with the songs. Moffat is somewhat chastened but proceeds with the tour, which meets with a mixed response. Older rural listeners are often unimpressed, though Moffat strikes a chord with younger audiences in Aberdeen and Edinburgh. The tour finishes at Glasgow's legendary rock venue Barrowlands, where Stewart joins Moffat on stage to deliver the original version of her signature ballad 'The Parting Glass'. It is the last time the two meet, as Stewart passes away later in the year.



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# Home cinema



Interrogation point: Rosalind Ayres and Warren Clarke in *Psy Warriors* (1981)

## CLARKE'S ORIGINALS

Radical, moral, compassionate: Alan Clarke's work for the BBC makes the case for his place in the pantheon of great British auteurs

### DISSENT & DISRUPTION: ALAN CLARKE AT THE BBC (1969-1989)

**THE LAST TRAIN THROUGH HARECASTLE TUNNEL/ SOVEREIGN'S COMPANY/THE HALLELUJAH HANDSHAKE/TO ENCOURAGE THE OTHERS/ UNDER THE AGE/HORACE/THE LOVE-GIRL AND THE INNOCENT/PENDA'S FEN/A FOLLOWER FOR EMILY/ DIANE/FUNNY FARM/SCUM/NINA/DANTON'S DEATH/BELOVED ENEMY/PSY-WARRIORS/BAAL/ STARS OF THE ROLLER STATE DISCO/CONTACT/ CHRISTINE/ROAD/THE FIRM: DIRECTOR'S CUT/ THE FIRM: BROADCAST VERSION/ELEPHANT**

UK 1969-89; BFI/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD (two separate DVD box-sets, 'Dissent' and 'Disruption'); Certificate 18; 1,995 minutes plus extras; 1.33:1; Features: 'George's Room'; 'Bukovsky' plus outtakes; Alan Clarke: 'Out of His Own Light'; Alan Clarke interviews, introductions by David Leland, audio commentaries, archival BBC discussion programmes, Clarke's letters, location photos, book with new essays and credits; Blu-ray collection only: six 'Half Hour Story' episodes

### Reviewed by Robert Hanks

Until now, watching Alan Clarke's television films has been hard work – you could squint your way through lo-fi videos of some of his best films (*Road*, *Elephant*, *Contact*) in murky corners of the internet, and sometimes make a pilgrimage to a screening: I saw *Baal* (1982), Clarke's version of an early Brecht play starring David Bowie, mixed up with a programme of Samuel Beckett, at BFI Southbank a couple of years ago, three decades after seeing it on television, and last autumn the Whitechapel Gallery in London projected a scratchy, rather dim copy of *Penda's Fen*, his weird anglo-mystical-queer *Bildungsroman*. At the very least, this comprehensive BFI box-set of Clarke's work at the BBC will save his admirers eye strain and shoe leather.

More than that, though, the remastered films and the thick volume of impassioned, scholarly essays accompanying them further the case that Clarke was the most consistently original and accomplished British filmmaker of the 70s and 80s. Together with the extras – including Andy Kelleher's four-and-a-half-hour documentary *Alan Clarke: Out of His Own Light*, there is material here for half a dozen PhD theses or several months' worth of watching and rewatching (I foresee 'Alan

Clarke box-set and chill' becoming the hot chat-up line of 2016). It's not uncommon to put Clarke in company with Ken Loach (leftwing leanings, roots in television); but seeing at one go the range of his work, the accusing swoop of his Steadicam, the painterly perfection of some of his scene-setting, it becomes plain that this is too narrow. He sits alongside Carol Reed, Michael Powell and Nicolas Roeg in the pantheon of British directors.

That is not to say that this is a collection of out-and-out masterpieces. In his essay 'Kicking against the pricks' in the April issue of *Sight & Sound*, Michael Brooke wrote (I paraphrase) that television directors are rarely treated as auteurs, and when they are the assumption is that the TV work is a prelude to the proper cinematic output. There are reasons for that, though. Clarke may have carved out a space for himself as an auteur, imposing his own way of looking at things, in terms of both morality and tracking shots. But you get some sense of the constraints he was under, of time, format, budget – and, hardest to quantify but perhaps most important, of working within an organisation continuously under press and political scrutiny, from which sprouted a defensive, smothering bureaucracy.

Hence, most obviously, the banning of *Scum*

in 1977. Forty years on, Roy Minton's portrait of life in a Borstal is still fresh and authentically upsetting, because of the violence, always shockingly abrupt, but more because of the queasy sexuality: the screw who doesn't interrupt a rape because he's enjoying watching; the relationship between Carlin (Ray Winstone) and a younger inmate (his 'missus'), which somehow got left out of the 1979 film version. You can measure the degree of anxiety at the BBC quite precisely by looking at the director's cut of *The Firm* (1989), restored for this edition and offered alongside the familiar broadcast version. Shifts in the colour make it easy to pick out the parts interpolated from a workprint: a violent sexual scene between top football hooligan 'Bex' Bissell and his wife (Gary Oldman and Lesley Manville, who were married at the time), a more lingering shot of a face being cut with a razor and the screaming that follows (Clarke understood, as few filmmakers now seem to, the limits of human anatomy, the horror of pain), and Bex's climactic beating of his rival Yeti (Phil Davis), now lengthier, more brutal and apparently culminating in some form of sexual humiliation. The restored cuts add to the film's emotional impact, though it is for me one of Clarke's less interesting works, remarkable mainly for Oldman and Manville's performances. Elsewhere, as in *Scum*, Clarke shows how violence grows out of situations and institutions; here, it sits in a vacuum.

The constraints of life within the BBC may also account for some works here which, however far they are imbued with Clarke's political intelligence and sensitivity towards actors, feel like contractual obligations rather than projects that enthused him. These include *A Follower for Emily* (1974), a sweetly bleak picture of love in an old people's home scripted by Brian Clark (best known for the euthanasia drama *Whose Life Is It Anyway?*); and Michael Hastings's *Stars of the Roller State Disco* (1984), an underpowered dystopia in which unemployed youth spend their days locked up in a state-run job-centre-cum-roller-disco, skating in circles in between applying for dead-end jobs – a metaphor in search of a dramatic point. Then again, the Orwellian interrogation drama *Psy-Warriors* (1981) is core Clarke material: written by regular collaborator David Leland, concerned with institutions and violence, and commenting not very obliquely on British repression in Northern Ireland. It also contains some of Clarke's best picture-making – torture scenes that resemble Renaissance religious art – but in hindsight it feels inert and unnecessarily elaborate.

Clarke did find ways of working the system: in his essay on *Beloved Enemy*, a 1981 drama about a British corporation doing a business deal with the Soviet government, Mark Duguid recounts that Clarke and his writer, Leland again, got the potentially dry subject matter through the commissioning process by adding a subplot in which an industrialist's daughter is appalled by her father's immoral world; that strand somehow vanished during production. The final film is indeed arid, but that is not to say it doesn't grip – it



Ray Winstone in *Scum* (1977)

would be worth putting in a double-bill with the Alec Guinness *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy* (1979) as complementary views of Cold War pragmatism, though Clarke's drama makes the Le Carré look stagy and melodramatic (he even manages to get a restrained performance out of Steven Berkoff).

And, of course, the BBC was never merely timid: working for a public broadcaster, free of commercial imperatives, enabled Clarke to produce things that would have been unthinkable in the outside world. Take David Rudkin's *Penda's Fen* (1974) – the story of a teenage boy growing up in the Malvern Hills, enthused by Elgar, patriotism and rigid notions of morality that swiftly dissolve as he discovers things about his parentage and his sexuality; all this complicated by visions, hauntings, political indignation, a bizarre and frustratingly unresolved paranoid science-fiction thread and Anglo-Saxon paganism (Penda was a seventh-century king of Mercia: Geoffrey Hill's 1971 collection *Mercian Hymns* was surely an influence).

Clarke himself said he had no idea what was going on in the play; but that willingness to create something undetermined, fuller of questions than meanings, makes it one of the great TV plays. The new print glows with life and detail. It has been a cult for a while; perhaps it will

*'Penda's Fen' is an assertion of the hybrid, mystic roots of Englishness that at this moment in history needs to be heard*



*Penda's Fen* (1974)

now reach a broader audience – it's an assertion of the hybrid, mystic roots of Englishness that at this moment in history needs to be heard.

Though the scale of the collection is impressive, it is also frustrating – you can buy *Penda's Fen* and *The Firm* separately, but otherwise have to spring for a hefty box-set. It is worth it to see how Clarke operates across genres. Though he is known as a social realist, he had a literary streak: witness a pair of classic German dramas – *Danton's Death* by Georg Büchner, filmed in 1978, and Brecht's *Baal* (1982), both poised between theatrical formalism and cinematic naturalism. (It's a shame Clarke never got round to *Spring Awakening*: Wedekind's drama of adolescent sexual repression would have been right up his street.) The Büchner stars the underrated Norman Rodway as the sensualist Danton, the Boris Johnson of the French Revolution, vying for power and then survival with Ian Richardson's ascetic Robespierre, the Gove. In the booklet, the critic Kaleem Aftab suggests that with the Labour government in crisis and Mrs Thatcher waiting in the wings, the play had unusual topicality; but there's hardly been a moment since it was written when it wasn't topical. In *Baal*, David Bowie is a nihilistic poet-seducer-murderer, punctuating the action with songs on which he accompanies himself on a low-slung banjo. Brecht's play is a mess, but Clarke used the studio space superbly, creating wide flat sets that could be filmed from a distance, giving it a theatrical, pictorial quality beautifully caught by this transfer; and Bowie, with scruffy beard and a permanent leer, rarely looked more raffishly cool.

The contrast between these wordy, studio-bound plays and the two Northern Ireland dramas *Contact* (1985) and *Elephant* (1989) could not be sharper. The first is a stripped-down account of an army platoon on patrol in the borders, which sets aside the temptation to comment directly on the politics of the Troubles: instead, this is another Clarke drama about lives denuded of choice and humanity. *Elephant* is even more sparse, an almost entirely wordless succession of shootings observed by a swift-moving Steadicam – the exhilaration of the camera's movement is offset by the almost Ozu-like pauses afterwards, the lens lingering on corpses in shitty spaces, in petrol stations and toilets. It is dour material: yet somehow, as so often, Clarke extracts from the despair something magical. ☹



David Bowie in *Baal* (1982)



# New releases

## ABSOLUTE BEGINNERS

Julien Temple; UK 1986; Second Sight/Region B  
Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD: Certificate 15; 107 minutes;  
2.39:1; Features: new documentary 'Absolute Ambition'

### Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Three decades on from the hype and hoopla that greeted its initial release, it's clearer now that this musical version of Colin MacInnes's 1959 novel, capturing a then new multicultural Notting Hill, is as much a film about the mid-80s as its floridly realised late-50s setting. A youthful protagonist pondering an upwardly mobile sellout while racial tensions explode around him? Welcome to the world of the Thatcherite economy and Brixton riots, and what a crazily ambitious notion to present it all as a stylised neo-*West Side Story* at a moment when old-school musicals were very definitely out.

For the opening few minutes it works like an absolute dream, David Bowie's soaring theme song followed by a frankly amazing tracking shot around a studio-created Soho neverland as Gil Evans's jazz score majors on brassy abandonment. Like wow, daddy-o! Subsequently, however, problems set in, since the weak slice-of-life narrative thread evidently needed a more charismatic point of focus than colourless lead Eddie O'Connell, and the full-on racial ferment appears to exist in another film entirely from the jaunty Tashlin-esque media satire elsewhere. By the end, it's dead on its feet, but taken in five-minute sections, one can still appreciate the sheer verve and craft involved in the outré period design, imaginative production numbers and gloriously excessive neon-splashed cinematography.

Director Julien Temple and company gave it everything they had, and surely deserve a lot more credit than the derision heaped on them at the time. Hopefully, this anniversary reissue will introduce a new generation to a movie that, for all its many flaws, remains flamboyantly unique within the annals of British cinema.

**Disc:** The Blu-ray transfer does justice to cameraman Oliver Stapleton's eye-popping colour schemes, while a new 53-minute documentary provides useful context on a famously troubled production, but proves rather soft on the evidently problematic script.

## THE CHASE

Arthur Ripley; USA 1946; Kino Classic/Region A  
Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD: 86 minutes; 1.33:1; Features:  
audio commentary by Guy Maddin, two radio  
adaptations of Cornell Woolrich's source novel 'The  
Black Path of Fear'; selection of film noir trailers

### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

A backseat driver takes over and jacks up the speed of a moving car through an automatic override device; a beautiful blonde is knifed in the spine while a nightclub singer croons a syrupy ballad; a man is backed into a dead end that he can escape only by means of dissociative fugue. These are a few of the elements that make Arthur Ripley's *The Chase* such a profoundly strange post-war thriller – while there are reams of material discussing David Lynch's borrowing from *noir* iconography, it shouldn't be forgotten that the *noir*, so-called, was capable on its own of being quite Lynchian, long before such a word existed.

The beautiful blonde is Michèle Morgan, whom navy vet Chuck Scott (Robert Cummings) meets when, penniless and down on his luck, he takes a chauffeuring gig from her husband, a sadistic Miami crime kingpin (oleaginous young Steve Cochran). The intrigues that follow take Chuck and the gal down to old Havana, and then things get really topsy-turvy – for Chuck is suffering from some form of PTSD, and it transpires that a great deal of the glamorous 'wrong man' adventure that we've been watching has in fact all been inside Chuck's shell-shocked skull. It's received wisdom that *noir* bears some relation to the trauma brought home by returning servicemen, but to my knowledge *The Chase* is unique in actually taking place, in part, within the theatre of one of those servicemen's minds. (Unique before 2010's *Shutter Island*, anyways.)

The 'it was only a dream' twist would appear to be an embellishment on the source material, Cornell Woolrich's 1944 novel *The Black Path of Fear*; two radio interpretations of which are included in Kino's package, one featuring the talents of Cary Grant. The embellishments of scriptwriter Philip Yordan and company sap the movie of some of the traditional satisfactions of a white-knuckler – the final showdown turns entirely on hubristic folly, not on a face-to-face standoff – but the resulting work is a whatsit unto itself, with the additional inducement of Peter Lorre as Cochran's blasé henchman. Lorre was an old pal of producer and Nero Films head Seymour 'Sy' Nebenzal, whose father had produced Fritz Lang's *M* (1931) before all fled the German catastrophe – one more instance of the impossibility of extricating the post-war thriller from the context of carnage it emerged from.

**Disc:** As smooth a transfer as could be expected from a patchwork of available elements, with a commentary track by Guy Maddin, whose attraction to such a curiosity needs little explanation.

## DEAD PIGEON ON BEETHOVEN STREET

Samuel Fuller; USA/West Germany 1972; Olive Films/  
Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD: 128 minutes; 1.33:1;  
Features: making-of documentary, two original essays

### Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Routinely puzzled over as Sam Fuller's semi-autumnal attempt at spy-movie pastiche, this grizzled piece of skylarking is actually his bid to join the New Wavers who worshipped him so ardently – it's the old-guard pulpster's most overtly Godardian film, a freeform mock-genre sibling to *Bande à part* and *Made in U.S.A.*



Lovely Rita: *Gilda*

Seven years after Fuller had appeared iconically in *Pierrot le fou*, you can smell the rule-breaking JLG-envy all over the place: declarative title cards, impish cutaways, self-reflexive gags, cartoonised violence (including a climactic quote from *A bout de souffle*), a visit to a theatre playing *Rio Bravo*, an actual clip borrowed from *Alphaville*, and the simple fact that, as in Godard, it's a movie in which the characters know they are in a movie, and that movie is driving them a little crazy.

Godard never had the bad taste to make such a carnivalesque hoot, though. A booze-reddened Glenn Corbett plays an American dick in Germany to track an extortion ring (a farcical riff on the Profumo affair) and avenge his murdered partner. A thoroughly game Christa Lang (Mrs Fuller) is his double-agent flirtation. Stéphane Audran (as Dr Bogdanovich), Anton Diffring, Eric P. Caspar (as Charlie Umlaut), and Fuller himself pop in and out, in what was originally intended as a particularly strange episode of the long-running German crime-anthology show *Tatort* (for years available only in a TV-ready form some 25 minutes shorter than Fuller's preferred cut, now restored).

The Godardian penchant for ignoring plot and just hanging out dominates the action; winding exposition scenes are played for the nonsense they are, and the sense of drunken fun had on set is really what's being served up (to a soundtrack by krautrock pioneers Can). It may not be top-shelf or even typical Fuller, but it's a unique call-and-response tissue-sample from the New Wave zeitgeist, and a lovely visit to downtown Cologne. **Disc:** Nicely restored print, with a welcome brace of contextual supplements.

## GILDA

Charles Vidor; USA 1946; Criterion Collection/Region B Blu-ray; 110 minutes; Certificate 12; 1.33:1; Features:  
audio commentary by Richard Schickel, interviews with  
Martin Scorsese, Baz Luhrmann and Eddie Muller, 'The  
Odyssey of Rita Hayworth', original trailer, booklet essay

### Reviewed by Kate Stables

*Gilda*'s highly strung, highly sexualised mix of *noir* thriller, romance, musical and Nazi mystery has long made it a bran tub for film theorists. Judging by the extras on this fine release, which give the 'femme fatale' question short shrift, we're no longer putting the blame on Mame. Instead, both Richard Schickel's authoritative commentary and 'czar of *noir*' Eddie Muller's persuasive interview are engrossed by the ringing gay subtext of the Glenn Ford/George Macready sides of the film's intense love triangle. Nonetheless, Rita Hayworth's visual and verbal provocations as the shimmering, shimmying *Gilda* still effortlessly monopolise the screen, and it's her combination of vulnerability and va-va-voom that keeps this perverse love story afloat.

Rich in Hollywood history, Schickel's reading of the film is beady-eyed on its role in Hayworth's shift from hooper to love goddess. Charles Vidor, who had launched her into stardom with the wholesome Technicolor *Cover Girl* (1944), shoots her here to maximise her dangerous allure, aided by cinematographer Rudolph Maté's expressive compositions and Jean Louis's show-stopping gowns. That black satin strapless 'striptease' dress



# THE OPPENHEIMER PROJECT

Mixing interviews with fact, fiction and psychedelic collage, this collection of early films reveals the route to *The Act of Killing*

## JOSHUA OPPENHEIMER EARLY WORKS: A COLLECTION OF 12 FILMS

LIGHT TEST/CAMERA TEST/HUGH/THE  
CHALLENGE OF MANUFACTURING/THESE  
PLACES WE'VE LEARNED TO CALL HOME/THE  
ENTIRE HISTORY OF THE LOUISIANA PURCHASE/  
LAND OF ENCHANTMENT/THE GLOBALISATION  
TAPES/MARKET UPDATE/A BRIEF HISTORY OF  
PARADISE AS TOLD BY THE COCKROACHES/  
MUZAK: A TOOL OF MANAGEMENT/  
POSTCARD FROM SUN CITY, ARIZONA

1995-2003; Second Run/Region 2 DVD; 177 minutes

total: 1.33:1/1.85:1; Features: new interview with Joshua Oppenheimer, booklet with essay by Gareth Evans

**Reviewed by Nick Bradshaw**

"My first apocalyptic fever dream," Joshua Oppenheimer calls his 1997 featurette *The Entire History of the Louisiana Purchase*, a thick gumbo of homegrown American mania that throbs with its own visions of power and demented imagination. For those of us who wondered where on earth the apparently *sui generis* traumatic landscapes of 2012's *The Act of Killing* and 2014's *The Look of Silence* had come from, this DVD scrapbook of Oppenheimer's earlier works and collaborations, from 1995 to 2003, has been long awaited and brings some answers.

Most of the disc takes us upstream (or down supply chain) from Indonesia to Oppenheimer's US birth land, and back almost two decades to the millenarian culture wars fanned by the Waco siege and the Oklahoma City bombing (but of course embedded in something much deeper). The half-hour *These Places We've Learned to Call Home* (1996), a 'videotape' co-directed with Jacob Silber, features a mash-up of apocalyptic imagery (flaming prams and public loos, negative surveillance footage of a lab-test dog) alongside recordings of the Texan-born Oppenheimer in performance-artist mode infiltrating American militia groups by posing as a UFO abductee and witness to alien/human impregnation. (Subtitles transcribe the subtext of these conversations.)

Before this there's the ten-minute *Hugh* (1996, co-directed with Nishit Saran), a comparably direct-image, non-collage encounter with a bearded Christian raver whose homophobia is queried on the street; the seven-minute *The Challenge of Manufacturing* (1996), which despite the title is less public-information film than Boschian tableau of mechanical depredations on animals; and two silent single-minute freshman fragments, *Light Test* and *Camera Test* (both 1995), in whose architectural imagery I fancied I saw emblems of Holocaust death-camp iconography.

In a supplementary interview on the disc, Oppenheimer recalls a homophobic street



**Immersive filmmaking: *The Entire History of the Louisiana Purchase***

assault he suffered in the mid-90s, and how this led to a quest to understand the perpetrators of oppression, alongside his prior questions of cosmology and purpose. That outreach across moral safety cordons and comfort zones was, of course, one of the distinctions of *The Act of Killing*; it's gestured to in *The Entire History*, Oppenheimer's Harvard grad-thesis film, a psychedelic collage of pioneer myth, genre, archive and interview in which, as in an Errol Morris film, it's rarely clear what's real and what's delusion or parody (though I'll put the through-fable of a self-professed virgin who microwaved her baby in the fiction column). The Antichrist also figures, but the film doesn't have the empathy-with-the-devil's helpers daring of *Killing or Silence*; its crazy-quilt Brechtian myth-play is more like a late John Ford western as retold by underground archive magpie Craig Baldwin.

That said, another inspiration, Oppenheimer's Harvard professor Dušan Makavejev, saw the makings of Oppenheimer's later works; *Purchase*, he wrote, "opens a genre of film as revelatory and intelligent dream, stimulant of social memory, and means for re-examining the relationship between fact and fiction, historical truth and social myth". Makavejev's text, included in a teeming impressionistic liner essay by Gareth Evans, is a gem of filmmaker-on-filmmaker criticism, up there with Vigo on Buñuel.

*The crazy-quilt myth-play is like a late John Ford western as retold by underground archive magpie Craig Baldwin*

At this point Oppenheimer went international – leaving the US first for the UK, then Indonesia and Denmark – and his art of collaboration became that much richer as he had to immerse himself in other cultures and characters. There are other provocative (very) short films on the disc – a minute's charm performance from a prison inmate working as a call-centre operator; a post-nuclear cockroach musical – but the third pillar of the release is *The Globalisation Tapes* (2002), "A Film by Workers for Workers" from the nascent Independent Plantation Workers' Union of Sumatra, and the project Oppenheimer has patiently recounted many a time to explain how he came across the showy tyrants of the diptych he would release a decade later.

A four-part on-the-ground exposé of neocolonial export-led globalisation, it frames familiar arguments with zest and chutzpah: we meet not just an oil-palm farmer so exploited that his son has to help him unpaid, but a decidedly unbowed herbicide sprayer who dances a mock advert for the poison she's given no protection from. There's a Rouchian circle of workers who debate their country's nonsensical official history after a screening of the film so far, a sighting of *The Look of Silence*'s late butcher Pak Sinaga, a hog shitting in mud to illustrate multinational corporations' local comportment, Yes Men-style performance as international money-lenders and Herzogian elephants made to play football (with a ball "paid for by the World Bank") when their jungle is remade as plantation.

The intended audience is, in the first place, a global-southern one: how to globalise the union movement, the film finally asks. How indeed. It ends with a rendition of 'We Shall Overcome'. 9



## Revival

## TALES OF MYSTERY AND IMAGINATION

Apichatpong Weerasethakul's debut feature zigzags from fish sellers to football to capture the spirit of millennial Thailand

## MYSTERIOUS OBJECT AT NOON

Apichatpong Weerasethakul, Thailand/Netherlands 2000

Second Run/Region B Blu-ray; 88 minutes; 1:78:1;

Features: 'Nimit' (short film reflecting on the director's family), Apichatpong Weerasethakul in conversation, 'Ball Games' essay by Tony Rayns

Edition filmmuseum/Region O DVD; 85 minutes; 1:78:1;

Features: 'thirdworld' (short film set to a conversation between two male friends as dawn breaks), 'Worldly Desires' (short capturing on-set moments of another director shooting a melodrama in the day and a pop video at night), 'Monsoon' (brief short of insect on finger being watched by boy in bed), essay by James Quant (in German)

## Reviewed by Nick James

For all its vivid colourful richness and tenacity, the art and cinema of Apichatpong Weerasethakul has its origin tale bound up in this grainy monochrome feature that starts out promising its own fairytale ("once upon a time...") but seems at first to want to sketch the poverty of life in a Thai city. Some kind of van retailing tuna fish and the sauces used to relish it weaves through the streets seeking customers. Soon one of the women fish sellers is sitting at the back of the van, telling an interviewer how her uncle brought her to the city and sold her for his train fare home.

So far, so social realist, but then her offscreen questioner – AW himself – suggests she tell us a different story. This never-mind-your-pain moment might seem callous were it not for the sense that it comes as a visible relief to her. She then begins a fable about a reclusive boy in a wheelchair and we see it enacted straight away in the next shot.

The boy has a female tutor, Dogfah, who collapses into a coma on the floor. A ball about five inches across rolls out from under her skirt and transforms into another boy (a cheeky lad who wears a T-shirt with an upward pointing arrow on it and the legend "100%"). We're taken out of the fish van, to a house with people washing dishes, where an older woman who clearly enjoys fabulating extemporises on the same story, explaining that the ball looked like a star that fell and resided in the boy's body. Some boys who've been playing a form of volleyball add their own commentary. Later the continuing story will be performed as a play by a singing troupe – who will complain about the lack of script – and then others, including various schoolchildren who take it on with charm and panache, each imagining a different fate for Dogfah and the boy, who might well be an alien.

This zigzagging yarn leads us on a road trip across the country, collecting characteristic sights and sounds of millennial Thailand – elephants, boxing rings, schools for the hard of hearing. AW's patient approach teaches us that we must



Saisiri Xoomsai as the boy in a wheelchair

go with the flow and work out for ourselves the shifts between dramatic fiction and documentary memoir, and when we are on set in between shots on a film-within-a-film. Slipping from one to the other with protean elegance, 'Mysterious Object' (as the main part of the film is called) puts one in mind of the near-invisible shifts of tone and focus in the prose of W.G. Sebald.

Since AW has an uncanny knack for when to cut between these different registers, it is easy to be beguiled into swallowing the belief system, into losing one's healthy scepticism about the animistic beliefs made manifest in the storytelling. But to dwell too much on animism would risk underestimating the film's affectionate real portraiture, its inclusion of political posters as context, and the pain evinced by its underlying theme of child abduction.

*We must go with the flow and work out for ourselves the shifts between dramatic fiction and documentary memoir*




Object lesson: Djuangjai Hirunsri as the teacher, with Xoomsai as her pupil


'At Noon' is a second story-free section of the film, in which a single camera observes children playing football in a school quadrant or swimming in the river – rescuing the ball when it falls there. We view it as a long post-credits sequence, as if we ourselves are allowed to stop concentrating and figuring out what's going on. Play and balls are the obvious linking concepts that unite the two parts, and the feeling that AW is to a large extent making it up as he goes along is confirmed by the credit he gives himself: "Conceived and Edited by..."

These two separate, estimable packages around AW's feature debut (the Blu-ray from Second Run, the DVD from the Austrian Edition filmmuseum series) offer different yet complementary pleasures. Both are based on the same restoration – a collaboration between the Austrian Film Museum and the Film Foundation's World Cinema Project. The film was shot on 16mm, but the 16mm original reversal film print is no longer to be found, so the internegative of the 35mm print blow-up was used. The Edition filmmuseum DVD gives a better sense of the swirl of grain and deliberate overexposure of the original, while the Second Run Blu-ray offers a much more detailed image quality.

The Edition filmmuseum offer of three shorts is a substantial bonus. *Worldly Desires* is a 43-minute evocation (at one remove) of shooting films and videos in the jungle; *thirdworld* shares some riverside footage with *Mysterious Object*, and *Monsoon* is all nighttime charm. However, the personal family nature of Second Run's offered short, *Nimit* (*Meteorites*) – which came out of an offer for AW to shoot a film about the Thai king – makes it unmissable too.

I haven't been so charmed by a debut feature coupled with shorts in a long time. 

# New releases

 was modelled on John Singer Sargent's creamily revealing *belle époque* portrait of 'Madame X', equally infamous in its time.

Ford, serving up deadpan cruelty and exquisite discomfort at Gilda's antics, was rarely better on screen and saw his stock rise accordingly. As he said: "I became a star when I slapped Rita Hayworth."

**Disc:** A covetable package, with a frankly gorgeous transfer that retains Maté's sharp monochrome contrasts and uncovers the fine details, such as the sharp flash of sequins on Gilda's opera coat. Students who need a close visual reading of the film will find it in Sheila O'Malley's careful essay.

## HERE COMES MR JORDAN

Alexander Hall; USA 1941; Criterion Collection/Region B Blu-ray; 94 minutes; Certificate PG; 1.33:1; Features: video conversation between Michael Sragow and Michael Schlesinger, audio interview with Elizabeth Montgomery (1991), Lux Radio Theatre adaptation, original trailer, booklet essay by Farran Smith Nehme

**Reviewed by Kate Stables**

The first and best of multiple adaptations across the decades of Harry Segall's stage play *Heaven Can Wait*, Alexander Hall's adroit comedy seasons its supernatural screwball with judicious pathos. Along the way, it creates the template for the 'afterlife' genre stretching from *A Matter of Life and Death* to TV's *Quantum Leap*, as Michael Sragow and Michael Schlesinger note in their affectionate extras discussion.

Robert Montgomery, best known for his tuxedoed MGM smoothies, had done a similar fish-out-of-water transformation in *The Earl of Chicago* the year before. Here he brings a sharp comic timing and a stubborn, bemused decency to boxer Joe Pendleton, literally a lost soul, scooting from body to body with Claude Rains's imperturbable heavenly administrator, to reclaim his fate and right wrongs. 'Decency' is holy writ here, despite the film's steadfast avoidance of religious imagery and bureaucratic playfulness about death. The stern Production Code objection that the film supported predestination also had to be dodged. To keep all of this aloft, the writing, by Sidney Buchman and Seton I. Miller, is notably nimble, and gained them an Oscar, despite the extraordinary calibre of 1941's offerings. Their patter for James Gleason's sceptical yet rapt boxing coach Max, cheerfully transmitting supernatural clues to exasperated cops, is a particular delight.

**Disc:** A crisp and gorgeous transfer that does well by Capra-favourite DP Joseph Walker's occasionally *noir*-ish compositions.

## A MONTH IN THE COUNTRY

Pat O'Connor; UK 1987; BFI/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 96 minutes; Certificate PG; 1.78:1;

Features: commentary, interviews, trailer, booklet

**Reviewed by Michael Brooke**

Originally given a low-key but enthusiasm-prolonged cinema release, long thought lost to all but poor-quality videotape when 35mm materials were erroneously believed to have vanished, and now revived in a new restoration, Pat O'Connor's second feature is of considerable historical interest today not just for its casting of Kenneth



**Ghost protocol: Here Comes Mr Jordan**

Branagh, Colin Firth and Natasha Richardson near the beginning of their film careers but also for being so unfashionably unhurried and contemplative, reflecting the gentle pacing of life in the Yorkshire village of Oxgodby. There, two former World War I soldiers (both with shell-shock symptoms) end up working on different projects in connection with a will promising a generous donation to the church in exchange for the restoration of its medieval mural and a thorough archaeological investigation into the whereabouts of an unmarked grave, whose occupant was buried in unhallowed ground.

As has often been the case in the past (Korda, Pressburger, Merchant, Ivory, Skolimowski), an outsider (O'Connor is Irish) turns out to have a better eye for the quintessence of 'Englishness' than most UK passport holders, particularly a dogged stoicism that seems exacerbated rather than diminished by the fact that so many young men of the time (the year is 1920) had personally witnessed hitherto unimaginable horrors.

O'Connor and screenwriter Simon Gray trust their audience to make the necessary connections – the relationship between Birkin (Firth) and the vicar's wife Mrs Keach (Richardson) is so low-key as to make the famously hesitant would-be lovers in *In the Mood for Love* (2000) seem positively orgiastic, but it's of a piece with the overall reticence. This understatement is characteristic of J.L. Carr's Booker-shortlisted source novel, and the film is also sensitive to its parallels between the mural's saints and sinners and the equally flawed flesh-and-blood humans who are contemplating them.

Just as the mural is brought back to life in the film, so the film itself has undergone its own revival, and it's still a very fine piece of work.

**Disc:** The slightly soft picture seems characteristic of the intended visual style. The disc ports over the Nick Redman/Julie Kirgo commentary from the US Twilight Time release and adds exclusive interviews with Firth (lengthy) and O'Connor. The booklet has good essays on the film (Jo Botting) and J.L. Carr (Andy Miller).

## POOR COW

Ken Loach; UK 1967; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; 97 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: interviews with Ken Loach, Terence Stamp and Nell Dunn

**Reviewed by Anna Coatman**

In an early scene in *Poor Cow*, Joy (played magnificently by Carol White) walks down a busy south London street, carrying her newborn baby under one arm. The camera cuts back and forth between her faraway face and the

people around her, as Donovan's doleful song 'Be Not Too Hard' plays: "Be not too hard for life is short / and nothing is given to man."

At the beginning of the film, director Ken Loach establishes the kind of compassionate, socialist perspective that would permeate the rest of his career. Joy's independence and individuality shine, but she is also shown, thanks to thoughtful editing, to be a product of society (in which nothing is given to man, and even less to woman).

*Poor Cow* was Loach's first feature film, and in many ways it's a blueprint for those that followed. It charts three years in the life of Joy – a young, hopeful, resilient woman who enjoys having different men to suit her "different moods". Her husband Tom (John Bindon) is a physical and emotional bully, who soon winds up in prison, leaving her alone with their son Jonny; and while Tom is away, Joy falls in love with one of his criminal associates, Dave (Terence Stamp, on excellent form). For a heartbreakingly brief period, Joy, Dave and Jonny experience true happiness together.

The performances are semi-improvised, giving the dialogue an immediate, naturalistic feel, and the soundtrack is a collage of Donovan songs (written specially for the film), snatches of commercial radio and occasional voiceover from Joy. The film is an adaptation of a novel by Nell Dunn – a writer known (though not well enough) for telling the stories of working-class women in the 1960s with a kind of brilliant, radical honesty; Loach takes lines directly from Dunn's writing, weaving them not only into the voiceover, but also into the dialogue and even the intertitles. There's no doubt that the film owes much of its warmth, wit and originality to the novel.

Rereleased nearly 50 years after it was first seen in cinemas, *Poor Cow* still feels fresh and urgent – even though the casual sexism, throwaway racism and ambient seediness it depicts root it firmly in the late 1960s. This formally innovative, tender film reminds you why Loach, about to release his 50th major work this year at the age of 80, is so worth celebrating.

**Disc:** Extras include interviews with Loach, Dunn and Stamp, offering new insights into the making of this British New Wave gem.

## RICHARD III

Richard Loncraine; UK 1995; BFI/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 104 minutes; Certificate 15; 2.35:1; Features: commentary and Q&A with Ian McKellen and Richard Loncraine, 'Play the Devil – Making Richard III', 'Shakespeare on Stage, Screen and Elsewhere', 2016 trailer

**Reviewed by Michael Brooke**

Purists beware: Shakespeare's second longest play is not only severely truncated (even more than the already brief running time would imply) but relocated to an imaginary 1930s fascist Britain, with Ian McKellen's Richard making (at least initially) a far more successful fist of seizing power than his real-life inspiration Oswald Mosley ever managed, cheerfully breaking the fourth wall to offer us a running commentary on events. His part-paralysed face, useless left arm, military uniform and general bearing suggest a no-nonsense military type, but he has all the guile of the real Richard's close contemporary Niccolò Machiavelli, running the gamut



# New releases

from wheedling to blackmail to outright murder before expiring in a fiery climax atop Battersea Power Station in a turn that owes more to Jimmy Cagney than Laurence Olivier.

But for all the considerable liberties taken with the text, this remains gloriously, full-bloodedly Shakespearean. McKellen adapted the text himself in collaboration with director Richard Loncraine, and it had already run the live-audience gauntlet thanks to a National Theatre production based on the same concept – although unlike many such transpositions, the stage roots are invisible thanks to Loncraine's muscular, flamboyantly cinematic approach, making full use of the widescreen frame.

Numerous witty touches include making Queen Elizabeth an American (Annette Bening), not for reasons of commercial convenience but because of the implied nod to the Wallis Simpson affair (and, by extension, her own royal lover's alleged sympathies in a particular political direction). The inspired use of highly recognisable London locations, with particular attention paid to period-plausible decor (for instance, the facade of Shell Mex House, built in the early 1930s), chimes beautifully with the blackshirted trappings, with Leni Riefenstahl an obvious visual influence on many of the exterior compositions. Everyone concerned – the crack cast includes Maggie Smith, Jim Broadbent, Nigel Hawthorne, Kristin Scott Thomas, Robert Downey Jr and many other familiar faces – seems to be having a whale of a time, and their enthusiasm could hardly be more contagious. **Disc:** No complaints about picture and sound (it's a recent 2K restoration), and the meaty extras include a commentary and conversation by star and director, as well as a lively 79-minute one-man show by McKellen on the subject of Shakespeare across various media. McKellen has also been given the run of the 32-page booklet, in which he discusses the adaptation process in detail.

## RICH KIDS

Robert M. Young: USA 1979; Olive Films/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 97 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: optional English subtitles

**Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton**

*Rich Kids* has a killer title, and the pluses don't stop there. Robert M. Young's walk-and-talk time capsule of Upper West Side Manhattan at the end of the 1970s is a sweet, intimate, tender-funny small-scale movie, a study in adolescent melancholy from a deft script by one Judith Ross that tempts comparisons to Truffaut – though a better analogue is something like Paul Newman's superlative *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon Marigolds* (1972), another smart, unpretentious bellbottom-era American film that has the feel of well-turned young adult literature.

The movie's dramatic incident is minimal, but what's there is explored in intimate, caring detail. Franny (Trini Alvarado) and Jamie (Jeremy Levy) are two pubescent New York kids from well-off, fucked-up families, the grown-ups all in therapy and afflicted with garden-variety Baby Boomer dysfunction. The crux of the movie is an unsupervised sleepover that Jamie and Franny have at Jamie's dad's midlife-crisis playpen bachelor pad – the adults here are



**Risky business: *Stuff and Dough***

mostly feckless and foolish, the kids wary and wise – and the fuss, fallout and mortification occasioned when they are discovered in the midst of childish sexual exploration.

Director Young, probably best known for his 1977 *Short Eyes*, never achieved anything close to the name-recognition of his executive producer Robert Altman – a friend of Ross's husband George W. George from back in their Kansas City days. He has had a diverse and interesting career nevertheless, acting as cinematographer on Michael Roemer's landmark *Nothing But a Man* (1964) among other endeavours, and *Rich Kids* shows him to be, if lacking in an aggrandising visual style, a director of significant sensitivity, able to coax forth lucid performances. The kids are great, with Alvarado at the beginning of a long, still-ongoing career, and so are the parents: John Lithgow, Kathryn Walker and Terry Kiser, a pushing-forty lothario in brown pleather.

If such a degree of patience and humility is easily achieved in filmmaking, one wonders why it isn't achieved more often.

**Disc:** A very strong, clean, nuanced transfer, and equally excellent work on the audio element, which includes Craig Doerge's piano score, unobtrusive, effective and just the right side of 'touching' treacle.

## STUFF AND DOUGH

Cristi Puiu: Romania 2001; Second Run/Region 0 DVD; Certificate 15; 90 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: Cristi Puiu interview, 2004 short 'Cigarettes and Coffee'; booklet

**Reviewed by Trevor Johnston**

Premiering in the Directors' Fortnight at Cannes in 2001 but never theatrically distributed in the UK, Cristi Puiu's debut feature preceded his breakthrough title *The Death of Mr Lazarescu* by some four years. That pitch-black slice of Bucharest misfortune was latched on to by international critics as evidence that something was really happening in Romanian cinema, underlined subsequently by a whole host of strong titles from Messrs Mungiu, Porumboiu, Muntean and so on. Essentially, though, the story started here.

As with so many Romanian offerings, the mood of *Stuff and Dough* seems to be one of low-key naturalism, as the ambitious young son of grocery-stall owners, eager to get into business for himself, takes on a pharmaceuticals delivery in exchange for handsome payment from a dodgy businessman. It's a lot of cash for a two-hour drive into the city, establishing an immediate note of insidious foreboding that's intensified when the

driver and his pals find themselves tailed by a red SUV whose occupants mean them serious harm.

In genre terms, it's a blend of thriller and road movie, and adept on both fronts, allowing for a slow build of tension and a journey with room for geographical observation and character development. Clearly, it's a social portrait of Romania in transition towards capitalism's risks and rewards, yet the magic here is how Puiu suggests a decidedly metaphysical confrontation with an uncaring universe with only the most everyday components at his disposal – already looking forward to the expansive mysteries of 2010's *Aurora*. A hugely impressive first feature – great to have it available.

**Disc:** An impeccable transfer delivers a typically sickly Romanian colour palette, while a fascinating filmed interview with Puiu shows the director pondering deeper issues than the mere technicalities of filmmaking.

## THAT COLD DAY IN THE PARK

Robert Altman: USA/Canada 1969; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; 107 minutes; Certificate 15; 1.85:1; Features: interview with David Thompson, booklet

**Reviewed by Philip Kemp**

Made just before he leapt to fame with *MASH* (1970), *That Cold Day* has become a largely forgotten item in Robert Altman's oeuvre. Critical response at the time ranged from tepid to hostile – “a cold, ugly and meandering business”, growled the *New York Times*. Altman himself seems to have retained little affection for it: “It was really a first film in a funny way, very pretentious and stylised,” he later said.

True, the film lacks something of the teasing psychological complexity of Altman's later work. But it stands as an intriguing precursor to a side of his output less often celebrated than the big, sprawling, multi-cast productions (*Nashville*, *Short Cuts*) that made his reputation: the female-centred chamber pieces such as *Images* (1972), *3 Women* (1977) or *Cookie's Fortune* (1999). Like them, *Cold Day* sets up its characters in a confined environment, then watches as the interaction between them disintegrates into violence or madness.

Initially, the set-up seems like a gender-reversal of *The Collector* (1965). Repressed thirtysomething spinster Frances Austen (Sandy Dennis) invites into her plush Vancouver apartment a nameless young man (Michael Burns) she sees huddled on a park bench in the rain. He seems to be a mute, and she sets about imprisoning him, apparently for sexual purposes. But in other ways the film looks like a nod to Bergman's *Persona* (1966): one character (Frances) talks ceaselessly, the other (Boy) never says a word.

The film's ambiguous mood is sustained by Dennis's nervous, haunted performance – her motivations always seem opaque, even to herself – and by the drifting, probing camera of László Kovács, whose protracted takes often end up zooming into an out-of-focus blur as if to reject any neat conclusions.

**Disc:** The HD master brings out all the subtlety of Kovács's photography and of the film's sound design. David Thompson's intro expertly places the film in the context of Altman's early career. **B**

## DINGO

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

Miles Davis makes his only feature-film appearance in this offbeat but beguiling mash-up of jazz, ambition and outback Australiana

**Reviewed by Jaymes Durante**

On a blistering summer's day in 1991, Dutch-born Australian auteur Rolf de Heer scrambles to organise a crew of 60 on an airstrip outside Meekatharra, a remote town in Western Australia. The tarmac is being torn up by a hired Boeing 707 whose pilot is refusing to drive the plane to its position at a constructed terminal set a kilometre away, surrounded by 100 extras and a dozen period cars in waiting. De Heer negotiates a deal with the pilot and secures the plane for the third and final day of the shoot, also his last day with the film's improbable star, the iconoclastic Miles Davis in his first and, as time would tell, only feature role.

The scene requires Davis – playing a trumpeter whose life unintentionally mimics many aspects of his own – to step off the plane, greet the townsfolk of the fictive Poona Flat, and play a tune. When he does, the film gives over to the mind of a local boy who listens to these new and indescribable sounds with pricked ears and envisages the exotic darkness of a Parisian nightclub. Davis leans in and, in his distinctive, nicotine-shredded rasp, says, “You ever tried music, John? If you ever come to Paris, look me up.”

The film is *Dingo*, no lost masterpiece (its director calls it “credible”), but a nonetheless beguiling curio unavailable outside the Antipodes due to a maelstrom of regional rights issues. The film brings Davis to the desert through an unlikely intermediary: co-produced by French parties and largely set in Paris in its final act, it is also co-scored, alongside Davis and at his behest, by the vivid Michel Legrand. The film's unavailability is almost understandable; anything as presciently transnational as *Dingo* was bound to face hurdles in distribution.

Whatever the outcome, *Dingo* testifies to the strange collaboration engendered by the globalisation of art. De Heer agreed to direct the script after persistent offers from screenwriter Marc Rosenberg throughout the late 80s, feeling he had matured into a filmmaker with enough pluck to handle its many variegated elements. Davis, notoriously uncooperative, was suggested to de Heer for the role of Billy Cross after Sammy Davis Jr died in early pre-production. De Heer's initial reaction to Davis's casting: “For fuck's sake, forget it.”

Now, reflecting on the troubled shoot and on Davis's performance in this peculiar failure of a film, he's more complimentary: “There's a complete mixture of stuff from Miles. Some scenes he just got it the whole time. Other scenes are completely cobbled together from



All that jazz: Colin Friels as Dingo, with Miles Davis as Billy Cross

*Davis seems relaxed in the film, with a low-key naturalism that befits the character he plays, a near synonym of himself*

what appeared to be drivel coming out of his mouth. He was enigmatic to work with, to say the least. But we got through it, and we got through it well enough.” Their workaday mateship is obvious; Davis seems relaxed in the film, and his delivery has a low-key naturalism that befits the sagacity of the character he plays, a near synonym of himself.

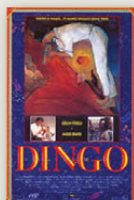
The aforementioned impromptu runway concert, equally illusory and palpable as shot by French cinematographer Denis Lenoir, is Davis's only scene in Australia, but it's foundational to the film: a love of jazz is planted in the boy, and when we're brought into his present it has bloomed into an obsession beleaguered by a lifetime of unfulfilled ambition and isolation in Poona Flat. John – nicknamed Dingo for

his job as a native dog trapper – is played in adulthood by Colin Friels, whose rough-hewn sincerity gives this film its local heart among a cornucopia of foreign influence. He's mocked by mates and entreated by his wife to shed ambition for desert life's practicalities. *Dingo* dissects these unique challenges in an uneasy admixture of Australiana and alien pull – the film's images are entrenched in a score that's defiantly non-specific to the region it depicts.

And yet *Dingo* shrewdly captures an almost bipolar affection and disdain for home that far-flungers will recognise well. Home's ubiquitous friendships, its distinctive land and customs, the intense specificity that comes with isolation, the impossibility of anonymity. For Dingo's peers, Perth (the world's most isolated capital city) is a metropolis where cosmopolitan men and women swill champagne and scoff “fish eggs” at parties. In Poona Flat, social life is lamingtons and ‘cold tinnies’ on trestle tables at the community hall, where Dingo & the Dusters play on weekend nights. Jazz is an anachronism, a fact only made more glaringly obvious when Dingo occasionally attempts to play it.

*Dingo's* flaws are self-evident. Its scenes in Paris feel dreamlike in their unlikelihood, and its neat denouement rings out not like a tense jazz riff but a false note – a comforting bromide that reminds us of home's incessant pull without asking us to consider Dingo's sacrifices and uncertain future. Yet it retains charm, perhaps a novelty in the absence of truly global films from an Australian cultural landscape intent on scouring single-mindedly over notions of national identity. *Dingo's* tripartite ownership – the chic of Legrand's *nouvelle vague* and the skeez and grandeur of Paris, the hoarse intonations of an august jazz legend, and the earnest grounding in remote Australian soil – retains its fascination. 🍷

### WHAT THE PAPERS SAID



**‘A film with a seriously split personality. Just when the scenes of Billy playing in the local band, trapping dingos and squabbling with his wife have begun to cohere into a pungent portrait of Australian rural life, the movie fantasises the Parisian jazz life as a millionaire's dream world.’**

**Stephen Holden** ‘New York Times’, 1994



# ALL IN THE DETAILS

## JEAN-MARIE STRAUB AND DANIELE HUILLET

Edited by Ted Fendt,  
FilmmuseumSynemaPublikationen, 256pp,  
€22, ISBN 9783901644641

### WRITINGS

By Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet. Edited  
and translated by Sally Shafto, Sequence Press,  
624pp, £27, ISBN 9780983216995

#### Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

What the French film critic Serge Daney once called the “Straubian International” – the happy few, or few at any rate, who pledge allegiance to the declamatory film-texts of married, trans-European filmmaking duo Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub – has reached something like critical mass this spring. If not the Finland Station, Straub and Huillet have arrived at least at the Museum of Modern Art in New York, whence a just wrapped complete retrospective now continues to convert North America.

This event was accompanied by the publication of two new English-language books collecting writing by and about Straub and Huillet. The first, *Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet*, in the Film Museum Austria's FilmmuseumSynema-Publikationen series, is mostly made up of other people's observations on the couple's films and working methods, including offerings from Jean-Luc Godard collaborator Jean-Pierre Gorin, and the German filmmaker and writer Harun Farocki, who appeared in *Class Relations* (1984), Straub and Huillet's ravishing adaptation of Franz Kafka's *Amerika*.

The volume's editor, independent filmmaker and New York-based cinephile jack-of-all-trades Ted Fendt, contributes a chapter on ‘The Distribution and Reception of Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet's Films in the English-Speaking World’, which is accompanied by a collection of documents pertaining to their relationship with Dan Talbot, founder of New Yorker Films and their greatest proselytiser in the New World. Many of these items testify to Huillet's extremely hands-on and methodical approach to all matters, from subtitling to handling travel expenses, a mania for preparedness in every aspect of production from pre- to post- which allowed Straub and Huillet to keep a radically non-commercial practice afloat without compromise over the course of 40 years. (It is amusing to note, however, that the duo seem to be confused as to the exact location of the Mississippi River.) “It's a detail,” she writes of some supposedly small piece of camera etiquette to cinematographer William Lubtchansky in the second of the new titles, *Writings*, “but...



No compromise: Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet

there are no details!” – as close to a manifesto as the comparatively reticent Huillet ever came.

The obsessively thorough methodology of Straub and Huillet is best understood through *Writings*, which features a ‘Foreward’ by Miguel



Straub and Huillet's *Class Relations* (1984)

Abreu, a longtime enthusiast of the couple's films whose Lower East Side gallery hosted an exhibition of Straub and Huillet-related artefacts to coincide with the NYC love-in. The most immediately alluring of these objects are the pages from Huillet's scripts. These are annotated and emended in coloured pencil hieroglyphs, the meanings of which were perhaps only comprehensible to their author, who will remain mum, having died in 2006, leaving Straub to carry on alone. *Writings* reproduces pages upon pages from *Antigone* (1992), *A Visit to the Louvre* (2004) and *These Encounters of Theirs* (2006), with Straub offering some insights toward decoding the markings. (“The different colors correspond to different days of rehearsal. The red triangle is the classic sign: danger, to point out the old ways in which [the actor] fell every time, things they needed to pay attention to.”) Happily, Huillet did leave behind her extensive responses to ‘A Work Journal for *Moses and Aaron*’, written by one of the filmmakers' assistant directors about the making of their 1973 film of Arnold

Schoenberg's unfinished opera. The pieces were originally published in the since defunct journal *Filmkritik* and are reprinted shuffled together in *Writings*, with one page of Woods facing one of Huillet. The back and forth goes down a rabbit hole of the most extreme minutiae, as does Huillet's exhaustive 'Small Historical Excursus', a treatise on the everyday customs and historical reality of the Mosaic Hebrews, which shows off the expertise Huillet acquired while preparing the film. Given that this is niche material in the best of circumstances, *Writings* will most appeal to the already converted enthusiast of the work of Straub and Huillet, whereas FilmmuseumSynema's book, which opens with a career-spanning critical biography walk-through by Claudia Pummer, has more that might appeal to the neophyte.

Where documents frequently find Huillet concerned with practical matters of organisation, Straub comes off as the designated polemicist of the pair – to him falls the job of making the grand proclamations, for good and ill. Straub has scattered about rather more published pieces for *Writings* to collect, beginning with early efforts in criticism, the first of these a missive from the 15th Venice Film Festival in 1954. In his earliest

*Where documents frequently find Huillet concerned with practical matters, Straub comes off as the designated polemicist of the pair*

extant writings, Straub – born in Metz but living in Paris by the time he'd begun to address a public – displays partisanship that are basically analogous with those of the nascent not-yet New Wavers, whom he knew and mixed with at the old Cinémathèque screening room on Rue d'Ulm.

In order to avoid being drafted into the Algerian War Straub fled with Huillet to Munich, where their careers as filmmakers began in earnest, and it is around this period that the idiosyncratic voice of Straub emerges, usually speaking up for minority opinions. While having little enough to say on the subject of the New German Cinema, Straub was a tireless advocate of the films of Peter Nestler, still largely unknown in the English-speaking world and overshadowed in web searches by a celebrity jump roper of the same name.

Straub also sings the praises of David Wark Griffith, referred to somewhat backhandedly as the "flower of the bourgeoisie of the southern States". The affinity may be slightly unexpected, for Straub is a trenchant Marxist who almost certainly must have found Griffith's personal value system abhorrent, though maybe he had a thing for "noble lost causes", as the Confederacy represented itself to be. In truth I don't much like Straub's personal politics, his 'terrorist' posturing or his paint-by-number anti-Americanism – but the ultra-engineered, oddly holistic films exist in a dimension beyond, and for those interested in the why and most especially the how of them, there are two new invaluable resources. 📖

## HOW FILMS WERE MADE AND SHOWN

### Some Aspects of the Technical Side of Motion Picture Film 1895-2015

By David Cleveland and Brian Pritchard, hardback, £45, 453pp, ISBN 9780955827181

#### Reviewed by Sonia Genaitay

"Motion picture film has gone now, and the skills of the medium lost," write David Cleveland and Brian Pritchard in the concluding paragraph of *How Films Were Made and Shown*. The prognosis for 'film on film' is indeed bleak, if not yet terminal, but there can be few more qualified to write its obituary than these two people so intimately connected to the medium and for whom film has been a lifelong preoccupation.

Whatever its future in production, films can be found in their thousands in archives, where they are preserved and restored alongside digital scans because of the uncertainties involved in long-term data storage. Film stock may be nearing obsolescence but it still needs to be understood and its many usages catalogued if we are to continue to enjoy the works that have been printed on it over the last 120 years.

This book is an attempt not only to chart the history of film technology – essentially an evolving succession of processes – but to record each development in all its minutiae. Advancing chronologically, each chapter is structured around the physical properties, changes and variations in film stocks, lab equipment, cameras, projectors and movie theatres, and how those changes affected film production in their time. While developments from overseas are recorded and documented, it is first and foremost a book about how films were made and shown in Britain.

Drawing from his experience running the East Anglian Film Archive, David Cleveland excels at extracting information about the regions, down

to the name of the operating projectors and cinema managers. Furthermore, the myriad case studies and references relate to British inventors, manufacturers and indeed physical locations. Brian Pritchard, meanwhile, uses his expertise as a lab technician and manager to illuminate the nuts and bolts of film technicalities.

Generally, the book displays a clear desire to share information and knowledge, being most generous in the quantity of stills, images and primary sources reproduced, many of them enlarged and in colour. The images themselves are copiously annotated and can just as easily be read on their own. A standalone chapter on early colour offers a perfect example of how the authors enliven an otherwise heavily written-about subject with unique images and their own personal experience in handling these materials.

It is a specialist book aimed at archivists and researchers who will appreciate the absolute dedication to the subject, and is likely to become a trusted reference for those working with film artefacts. While the vertigo-inducing amount of detail and the absence of sub-chapters can feel a little overwhelming and make the book difficult to navigate, the layout is consistently good and more than makes up for the idiosyncrasies of what is a self-published project.

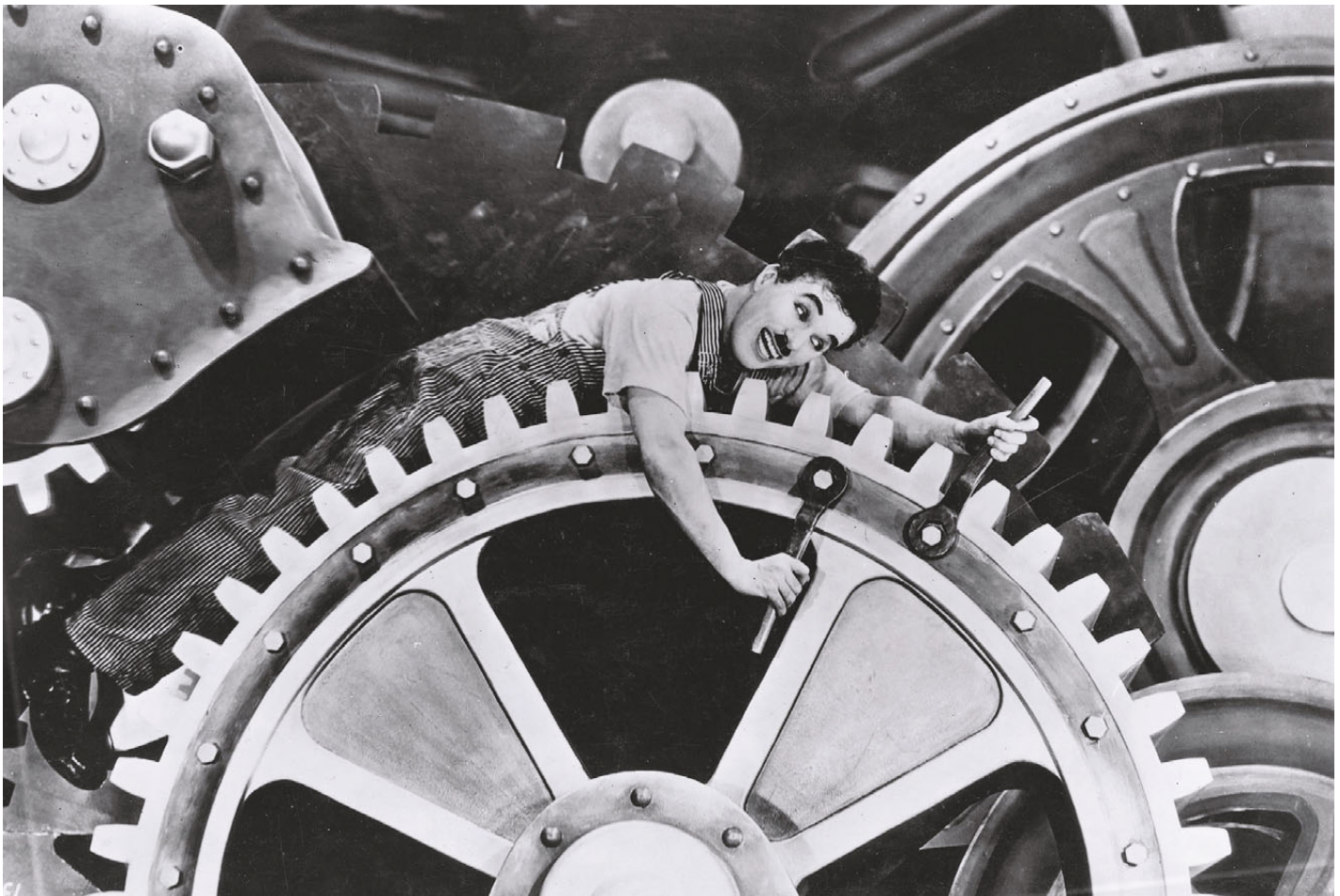
The authors do acknowledge that film is still supported by a small but determined crowd of manufacturers (Kodak at the helm), filmmakers and enthusiasts, not to mention film archives. The fact that a book called 'How Digital Cinema Packages Were Made and Shown' is unlikely to elicit similar appeal 50 years hence suggests that there might be life in the old dog yet. 📖

*It is a specialist book aimed at archivists and is likely to become a trusted reference for those working with film artefacts*



In a lonely place: the BFI National Archive at Berkhamsted





Man vs machine: Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times* (1936)

## THE CHAPLIN MACHINE

### Slapstick, Fordism and the Communist Avant-Garde

By Owen Hatherley, Pluto Press, 230pp, hardback, £16.99, ISBN 9780745336015

#### Reviewed by Henry K. Miller

The substance of Owen Hatherley's seventh book largely predates his rise to renown as an architecture critic and cultural commentator. Derived from his PhD thesis, it is a study of the 'Americanism' of the Soviet and German avant-gardes of the 1920s and early 1930s. The fascination of communist artists and intellectuals with an imagined version of the capitalist West, all skyscrapers and industrial efficiency, which was shared by the constructivists, the eccentricists, the literary critics Viktor Shklovsky and Walter Benjamin, and the theatre director Vsevolod Meyerhold, among others, was, says Hatherley, a "serious and revolutionary" attempt to "take America and make it better, make it more equal, make it socialist".

The territory is not unknown to scholarship, but for Hatherley what has till now been overlooked is the political significance of the Americanists' interest in popular culture, principally silent comedy and jazz, which was not frippery but integral: "We must not patronise constructivism as a kind of aestheticism of politics and machinery that only affixes itself to politics through an aesthete's fetishisation." In the view of earlier critics such as Peter Wollen, the Soviet Americanists had naively ended up

extolling the technocratic society presaged in the factories of Henry Ford and the theories of F. W. Taylor, who sought to adapt the human body to the demands of heavy industry. For Hatherley, however, the best of the Americanists were saved from reaching this conclusion through the leaven of cinematic slapstick, in which "the body's mechanisation is the generator of pleasure, not merely a conduit to the increased production of pig iron".

The exponents of what he calls 'Chaplinism' sought to discover "whether the 'audience' could be radicalised through the production

*Chaplinism promised to 'make the factory more like the circus and the circus, vaudeville and cinema more like the factory'*

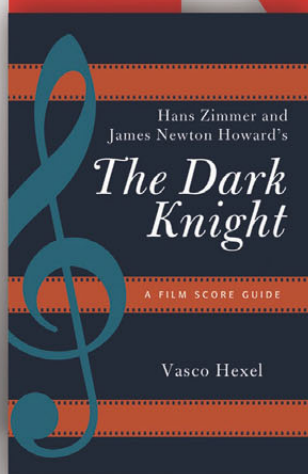


Chaplin in *The Circus* (1928)

of a mutant form of their mode of evening and weekend escapism". What is at stake is the question, which for Hatherley is still current, "What in the advanced mass-produced culture of the present can possibly presage the culture of the communist future, if anything?" Hatherley's sources include Peter Bürger's influential *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, which characterised the avant-gardes as aiming at "the transformation of art through the transformation of everyday life, and vice versa". Thus Chaplinism promised to "make the factory more like the circus and the circus (and the associated popular forms – vaudeville, cinema) more like the factory".

With regard to the issue of whether Chaplin might be the model of a socialist new man (a "self-propelling marionette"), Hatherley writes, "A possible answer could be found with the avant-garde group Devetsil in Czechoslovakia", whose manifesto included "Dada and clowning as a praxis of life". I am not convinced that artistic manifestos such as these are meaningful political statements. Hatherley's reasonable view that Stalinism was not inevitable is pushed to the point where anything, up to and including world revolution, was possible. Moreover I am unconvinced that the avant-gardes' utopias were or are desirable. The promise of "post-revolutionary life slipping on a banana skin, a pratfall, as a vertiginous and hard-to-negotiate new space – the world turned upside down" sounds hair-raising. For Hatherley these dreams "do not deserve to be treated as naive and unworldly" because their dreamers had seen war and revolution; but experience is no guarantee of wisdom, and naivety may in this instance be the artists' best defence. ⑥

# Read



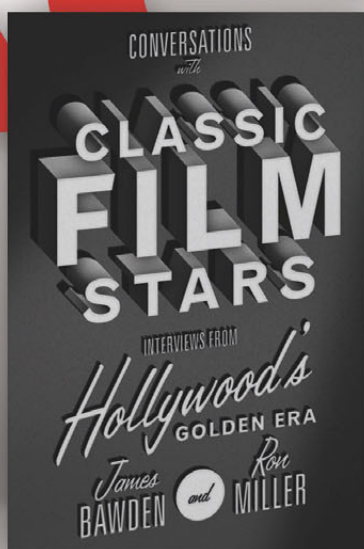
## HANS ZIMMER AND JAMES NEWTON HOWARD'S THE DARK KNIGHT

**A Film Score Guide**

By Vasco Hexel, Rowman & Littlefield, 234pp, paperback, £32.95, ISBN 9781442266728

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## CONVERSATIONS WITH CLASSIC FILM STARS

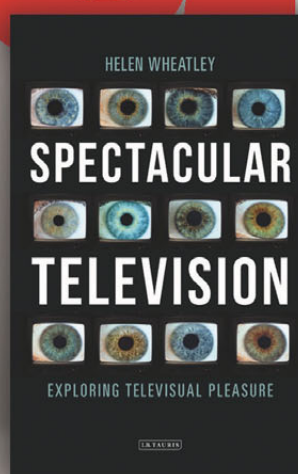
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By James Bawden and Ron Miller, University Press of Kentucky, 440pp, hardback, illustrated, £32.50, ISBN 9780813167107

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By Helen Wheatley, I.B. Tauris, International Library of the Moving Image series, 288pp, hardback, £69, ISBN 9781780767369, paperback, £16.99, ISBN 9781780767376

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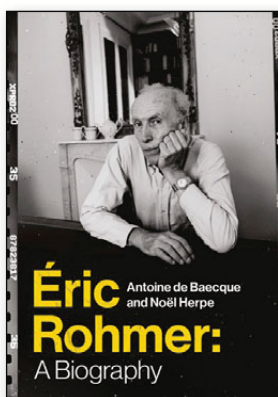
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Palgrave, 160pp, paperback, £16.99, ISBN 9781844576371

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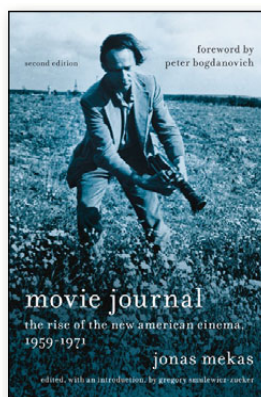
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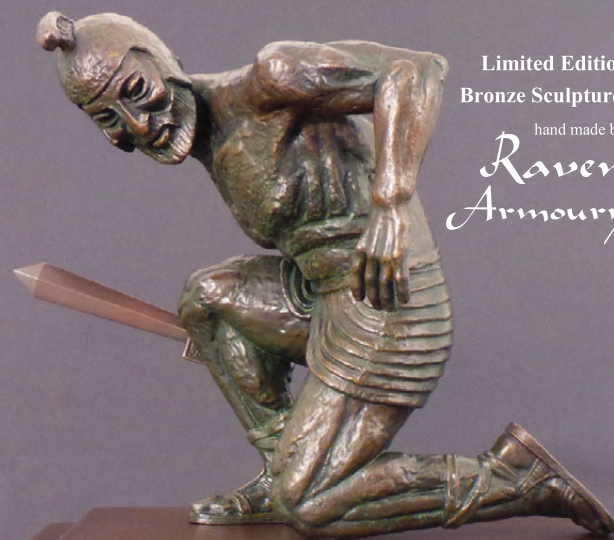
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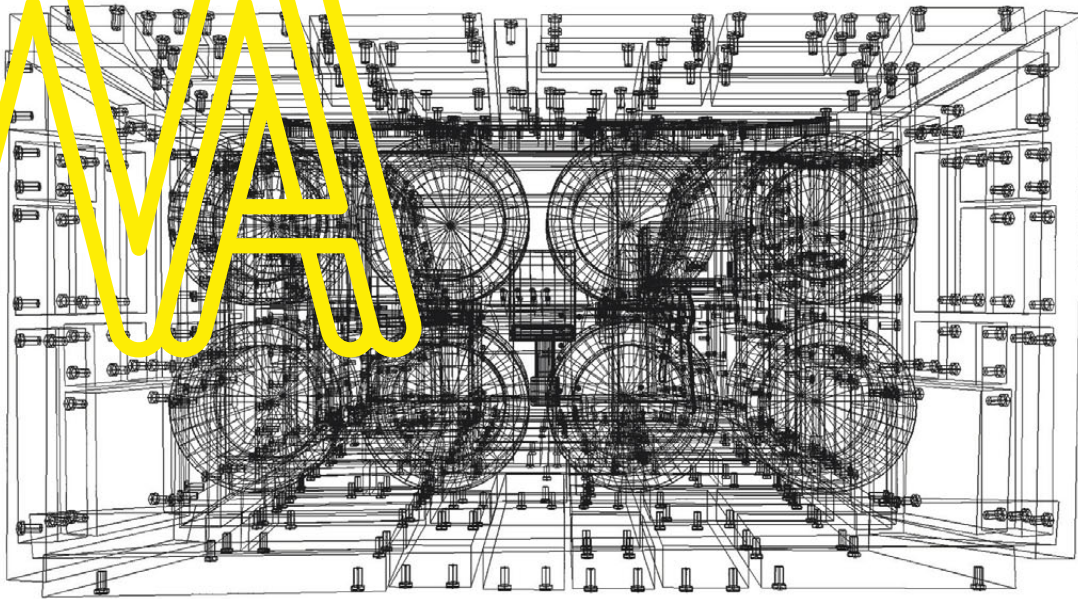
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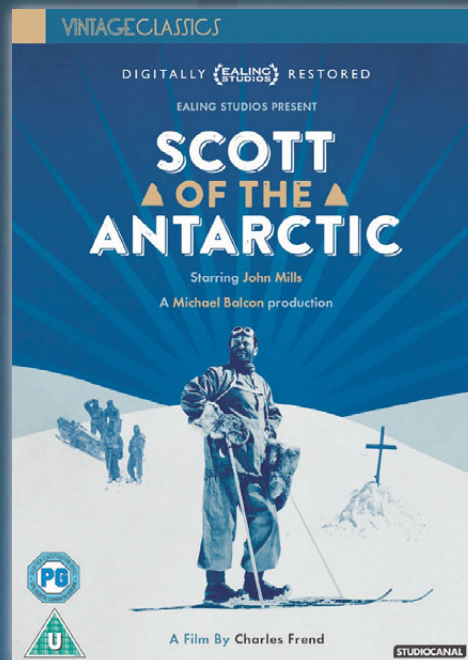
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# READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at *Sight & Sound*, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN  
Fax: 020 7436 2327 Email: [S&S@bfi.org.uk](mailto:S&S@bfi.org.uk)

## POETIC JUSTICE

I wanted to write to say how enamoured I am of Kim Newman's review of *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* (S&S, June). It was a masterclass in taking seriously the cultural impact of graphic novel culture while seeking seriously to deconstruct the film. It perfectly encapsulated why *Sight & Sound* exists: to inform readers and aim for balanced assessments of cinema.

**Richard Sherwood-Farnfield** Maidstone

## THE HORROR! THE HORROR!

I agree with Nick Pinkerton's implication, in his review of *Pieces* (Home Cinema, S&S, June), that the lack of perfectly earnest exploitation is an issue. But 5,000 or so horror movies are being made this year in the US alone – including the likes of *Vector III* and *Diary of a Badman*, micro-budget films unable to get even a cursory release. With so much trash being pumped out, possible so-bad-it's-good gems are getting lost in the shuffle. In the 80s, only hundreds of films were getting made, not thousands, and thus a film like *Pieces* could get a big release. Sadly, gone are those days.

**George White** County Wicklow, Ireland

## PAINFULLY WRONG

You butchered that Mel Brooks quote on page 7 of your July issue to the point of removing its central point altogether. It should read, "Tragedy is if I cut my finger. Comedy is if you walk into an open sewer and die." The distinction between one's own pain and someone else's is crucial to the point Brooks was making here, and by rendering both pronouns as 'I' you make his remark read as nonsense.

**Paul Slade** London

## BEYOND HOLLYWOOD

While Kim Newman's appraisal of the Hollywood buddy movie ("Two for the road", S&S, July) was excellent, it's a shame he couldn't have broadened his scope to include British entries in the genre too – such as the Sweeney movies or the criminally underrated *The Squeeze* (1977), with the once-in-a-lifetime pairing of Stacy Keach and Freddie Starr, driving around London and having car chases while Carol White is tortured to the sound of The Stylistics, or even the various permutations of Sid and Bernie in the *Carry On* films. He could also have mentioned Michael Winterbottom's *Butterfly Kiss* (1994) in his run of lady-buddy movies – a rare British entry in that sub-genre.

**George J.G. White** By email

## CONTRACT KILLERS

In her article on Olivia de Havilland ("Steel and silk", S&S, July), Farran Smith Nehme says that years before de Havilland's successful attempt to break her contract with Warner Bros, Bette Davis had failed in a similar challenge. That is not quite true. In the case of Warner Bros Studios Inc vs Nelson (Davis's married name), the court refused to enforce 'specific performance' of the contract – so though Warners could prevent Davis working

## LETTER OF THE MONTH BEHIND BARS



I've just seen Deniz Gamze Ergüven's *Mustang* (above) and must take issue with aspects of Nick Pinkerton's otherwise excellent review (S&S, June). He suggests that Ergüven fails to capture a sense of "choking claustrophobia"; yet symbolically, she reinforces confinement in many ways. Little juxtapositions prevail throughout the film: the girls sunbathe in a little alcove behind bars which their grandmother has installed to keep them contained; in Lale's recce of her garden, tree branches are entwined with barbed wire fencing, a clear metaphor for the oppositions of freedom and confinement which the film continues to foreground. We don't need to see close-ups of the bars: they remain in the background to the girls' everyday

lives. There are also some lovely physical transitions throughout the film which subtly draw attention to the girls' entrapment – the circular movements of the girls' hands as they roll dough is repeated by Sonay as she cleans her bedroom windows, then becomes a gentle wave to her lover as he watches from outside: this subtle transformation of an action which signifies confinement to one which is a yearning for escape says more than the clunky clichés the reviewer wants to see.

In all, then, I'm not quite sure what Pinkerton means when he claims that the film fails to capture "the feeling of mounting cabin fever". The girls' confinement, frustrations, terror are always there, part of their everyday world.

**Lance Hanson** By email

elsewhere, they could not force her to work for them. Warners did not see it as a satisfactory result.  
**Adele Winston** Barnet

## MUMBLINGS OF DISCONTENT

Recently, TV programmes such as *Jamaica Inn* and *Happy Valley* have been criticised for poor sound quality. Since the advent of the TV channel Talking Pictures I have viewed many old, mainly British, films dating from the 1930s. I have never had any trouble in hearing the dialogue. For example, watching *Lord of the Manor*, made in 1933, when sound films were in their infancy, I heard every word. This was not the case with the recent film *The Goob*: much of the dialogue was thrown away in the name of realism, and I had to read the review in S&S to confirm plot details.

This problem is endemic, but I don't think it is the fault of those responsible for sound. Directors, actors and editors are to blame. When the finished film is viewed before release, the dialogue is so familiar that it is forgotten that the viewing public are hearing it for the first time. Thank goodness there are subtitles when watching a film on television, though they should not be necessary.  
**Keverne Weston** London

## Additions and corrections

**May** p.71 *Arabian Nights Volume Two The Desolate One*, 15, 132m 15s; p.82 *Heaven Knows What*, 18, 96m 49s  
**June** p.89 *Suburra*, 18, 134m 58s  
**July** p.66 *Adult Life Skills*, 15, 96m 36s; p.70 *Baskin*, 18, 96m 34s; p.73 *Crazy About Tiffany's*, 15, 86m 54s; p. 60 *Fire at Sea*, 12A, 113m 32s; p.79 *Long Way North*, PG, 81m 37s; p.81 *The Measure of a Man*, PG, 91m 16s; p.86 *Notes on Blindness*, U, 90m 19s; p.88 *Versus The Life and Films of Ken Loach*, 12A, 93m 27s



# THE THING



The ending of John Carpenter's Antarctic-set horror classic isn't really an ending at all – which is why it sticks in the mind

By Anne Billson

"Why don't we just... wait here for a little while. See what happens."

There's nothing like an ambiguous ending to help a film endure, if only because it obliges us to think about it. Films offering too much in the way of closure aren't as likely to take root in our imaginations because they leave no room for us to ponder, "But what if?" or even, "What the hell?"

Audiences may think they want all the loose storylines tied up, with the monster destroyed and a semblance of order restored to set their minds at rest. But so long as there's still room for speculation, a film can never truly be over. What will the birds in *The Birds* (1963) do next? Is Tony Soprano dead or alive? Has Dom Cobb in *Inception* (2010) really woken up? Absence of resolution encourages discussion, and has the additional advantage of appealing to both optimists and pessimists. As with Schrödinger's cat, two competing options are present in the same moment – there might be a happy ending or there might not. Take your pick.

Opponents of ambiguity accuse filmmakers who employ it of laziness. But there can be few endings as apposite as that of John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982), critically reviled on its release, but now acknowledged as a modern classic of horror. The setting is an American research base in the Antarctic which is infiltrated by a shape-shifting

parasitic extraterrestrial that can perfectly imitate its hosts. When the men discover its nature, they become paranoid and turn on each other, not knowing who is human and who an imitation.

The film's ostensible protagonist is R.J. MacReady (Kurt Russell), who recognises the threat this poses to the outside world and says, "We aren't getting out of here alive, but neither is that Thing." After his colleagues have all died or been infected, he lobs a stick of dynamite at what seems to be the creature's final mutated manifestation. It's a kamikaze gesture since the resulting explosion also destroys the base, and with it MacReady's own chances of surviving the Antarctic winter. But at least he has saved civilisation.

Or has he? In the final scene, as he settles down in the smouldering remains of the camp with a bottle of whisky, another survivor appears: it's Childs (Keith David), who had earlier gone missing in a storm. The two men eye each other suspiciously. "If we've got any surprises for each other," says MacReady, "I don't think we're in much shape to do anything about it." The film ends with the two men sharing MacReady's bottle, apparently waiting to die.

At the beginning of the film, we were introduced to MacReady playing computer chess – and being checkmated. Is the ending another checkmate? Or a stalemate? Has the

*MacReady and Childs are left waiting like Vladimir and Estragon for something that may never take place*

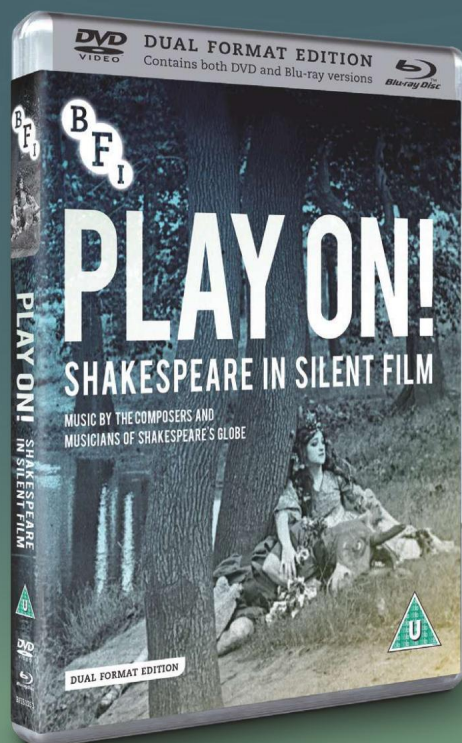
Thing really been destroyed? Will both men die, or is one of them a Thing? One theory has it that Childs is infected because you can't see his breath, whereas MacReady's is clearly visible. Or might this just be an effect of the lighting? Perhaps sharing that bottle of whisky was a mistake... It's up to fans to speculate, which is precisely what they have been doing since 1982, more recently on websites such as Outpost#31.

At the end of both the source material, John W. Campbell's 1938 novella *Who Goes There?*, and its first screen adaptation, *The Thing from Another World* (1951), the extraterrestrial is clearly destroyed – though the original film signs off with the line "Keep watching the skies," hinting that the threat might not be definitively obliterated.

But Carpenter leaves us instead with MacReady and Childs waiting like Vladimir and Estragon for something that may never take place.

"There was a great deal of pressure to not end the movie the way it ended," said Carpenter. Producer Stuart Cohen, on his blog *The Original Fan*, talks about two alternative endings that were shot but never used: one in which Childs never reappears, leaving MacReady to face death alone, and another in which MacReady appears to have survived, and is awaiting the results of a blood test at McMurdo Station.

Ultimately though, Carpenter says, "We went ahead and left my ending intact." And those final moments are the perfect distillation of the themes of identity, trust and survival that form the backbone of the film, providing its tension and dramatic thrust. As Childs says, "So how do we know who's human? If I was an imitation, a perfect imitation, how would you know if it was really me?" ☹



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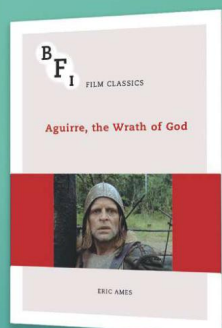


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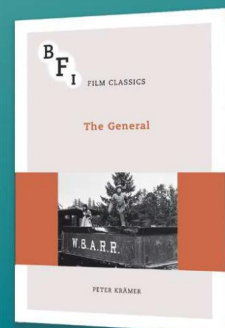
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